

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS IN
PLAYWRITING**

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2010-2011

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CRAFT

ESSAY

This essay provides a rationale behind the creative choices I have made in my MFA in Playwriting. It outlines and critiques my modus operandi and analyses the pros and cons of the various models which influenced me. It describes my aims, what I have learned, and what I would do differently if I could begin again with the knowledge I now possess.

When I was in the earliest stages of formulating ideas for a full-length play this year, it occurred to me to write a play which has as one of its themes the actual artistic struggle of playwriting. I realised I had readily available material from which to draw, because I was experiencing this self-same struggle for inspiration, cohesion and structure. I began to consider taking the autobiographical element even further and setting at least part of the play on a university campus, dealing with the dynamics of the one-on-one relationship between a creative writing supervisor and his student.

However, I then needed to examine this scenario for possible dramatic conflict, and the phrase ‘power struggle’ immediately came to mind. This relationship between supervisor and student has the potential to be double-edged. On the one hand, the supervisor is ethically obligated to guide the student; on the other hand, if the supervisor is jealous of the student’s fresh ideas – or has some private grudge against the student – this position of power could be exploited through sabotage of the student’s material. This facilitates opportunities for dramatic tension through conflict of interests.

In my play, it arguably requires a certain ‘suspension of disbelief’ that a student’s work would be of such a high standard that the teacher would be maniacally jealous of it, but there is no reason why this could not potentially occur – especially if the professor is facing deadlines of his own. Without this premise, the key theme of the power struggle could not have worked. This confirms Battye’s view that accuracy is secondary to the creation of

suspenseful writing (42). Plus, any ‘suspension of disbelief’ contributes to the satirical nature of my play. Provided a premise is appropriate and argued convincingly, it can be made plausible.

What seemed to be developing was a darkly comic two-hander, reminiscent of Donald Margulies’s *Collected Stories*. This was a particularly relevant model for me because it situates these concepts of power struggle and sabotage specifically within the creative writing context – the teacher and student are both writers. In Margulies’s play, the theme of sabotage takes the form of the student publishing a novel loosely based on the teacher’s life. The teacher, Ruth, regards this as a betrayal and a theft of her identity; the student, Lisa, considers it artistic license. However, by choosing to invert this idea and have the teacher sabotaging the student’s work – not to mention killing her – the comedy in my play is even darker because William is unambiguously in the wrong.

Another two-hander exploring the supervisor-student power struggle which I used as a model is David Mamet’s *Oleanna*¹. In fact, Mamet’s device of the telephone as a disruptive weapon in this play is what gave me the idea of having the Vice Chancellor regularly telephone my protagonist, William Voight, pressuring him for more output. The young student Carol’s growing frustration with John’s elitist inflexibility in *Oleanna* is an element I was keen to incorporate into my own play. John relishes using esoteric jargon in order to make Carol feel intimidated and inferior. This same dynamic operates in my play but on an even more sinister level, because William convincingly uses this academic language to sabotage Cameron’s work.

¹ This essay uses specific page references in textbooks, but only discusses the pervasive techniques, themes and moods of each of the model plays in terms of their overall effect (see *Works Cited* page for full details).

Although this particular plot-line was solid, I had the feeling that I would be unable to sustain a unique two-hander to full-length with this single theme. So either I had to devise more themes and issues for the pair to discuss, or invent more characters, or both. I ultimately chose to do both, because it would give the play more depth. Because I wanted William to win through at the end by literally getting away with murder, I decided to make him the central protagonist. Placing William under increasing pressure not only increased the tension and drama but also provided him with mitigating circumstances for his actions so that, by the end of the play, audiences will ideally find they do not despise William as much as they perhaps feel they should. However, I did not want the play to be exclusively from the protagonist's perspective, but rather to have the balance and increased complexity of omniscient viewpoint.

Completing character charts based on Linda Aronson's model answered probing questions, and forced my mind down avenues I would otherwise not have taken (41). Halfway through completing a chart, I would often find that a character was not interesting or complex enough to warrant a physical appearance. As Susan Battye confirms, each actor deserves a demanding task (33). In this sense, making decisions about the way in which each character would come into being - if at all - also helped develop the plot. This directly demonstrates the inseparability of character and plot development. Renée articulates my experience that a writer's freedom of choice is both terrifying and empowering because of the need to ensure that the optimum choices are made. 18).

I then devised further wants, goals and obstacles for my characters, according to Aronson's model (Aronson 46). I had a keen awareness of Ayckbourn's advice that, "...characters must undergo a journey too. Not just the plot" (44). In other words, drama stems from the events of the play impacting on a character's outlook and behaviour. In order

to add even greater depth, I formulated scenarios whereby characters whose paths may not immediately have crossed had an opportunity to interact with one another on stage and come into conflict as Marsh Cassady suggests (38). I could see from this that my comedy would be decidedly black in tone. The relationship between the uptight William and the domineering Shona – with its regular caustic verbal one-upmanship is modelled on the interaction between Martha and the professorial George in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Similarly, Martha's seduction of the much younger Nick, largely in an attempt to humiliate her husband, was what gave me the idea for the similar relationship between William's wife Shona and his publisher and agent Nick Slade.

I now had fairly well-rounded characters and a basic plot. It was at this point that my enthusiasm got the better of me and I began writing drafts of dialogue rather than fully fleshing out my plot and structure. Smiley and Burt severely criticise this course of action: "...too many people fail to conceive a structural plan before writing dialogue" (292). In retrospect, my actions were understandable but naïve, and I now have more awareness of the necessity of careful planning. Writing the dialogue for those scenes was not altogether counter-productive because occasionally it would spark ideas for further plot development; but if I had the opportunity to start the project from scratch, I would make dialogue-writing the very last stage of the process. Marsh Cassady advises, "...[Don't] think of it as writing a play. Think of it as writing bits and pieces...", and that is exactly what I endeavoured to do (59). I formulated a plot outline and summary of each character's development. Only then did I write drafts of dialogue for each of the remaining scenes, and order them according to my plot outline so as to give the play a structure.

However, the main criticism of my first draft – quite justifiably – was that most of the conflict between characters was not evident. As such, the play appeared somewhat

insubstantial. The stakes needed to be raised, and more overt confrontation was required. As Noël Greig puts it, “The more complex the story, the more complex the questions” (24). So I heightened the tension and consequences wherever possible.

As a result of such major revisions, the play is far more entertaining and weighty. It is highly comedic, but deals with serious themes and raises potent questions. In this respect, comedy – however black – is particularly effective because writers can get away with a far harsher critique if audiences are able to laugh at themselves and society in the process. My title *Fair Play* not only relates to the text’s concern with playwriting, but is also used ironically – not one of my opportunistic, self-centred characters believes in “fair play.”

My second creative writing project for the year was a collection of short plays. This came into being because I had several different ideas for more plays, and I felt a collection of short pieces would add variety. However, before I could begin, I had to make sure that each play would be appropriate for this short form, rather than feeling like under-developed, malnourished ideas for long plays. Also, I followed Renée’s advice that short plays should not have large cast numbers because production becomes less commercially viable (37). To maximise variety and demonstrate technical ability, I ultimately used the styles of different playwrights and plays as models to simultaneously emulate and make my own.

I wrote a first draft of *Admit One* without supervision in 2009 in the form of an almost full-length play with multiple characters. However, I came to the conclusion that, although it was semi-autobiographical, there simply was not enough plot or action to make it interesting to an audience – even as a radio play. Susan Battye verifies my awareness that theatre audiences even more than television audiences demand value for their money (39). This supports Roger Hall’s warning against excessive dialogue at the expense of plot (61).

As most of the experiences depicted in *Admit One* actually happened to me, I felt it was appropriate to maintain a sense of subjectivity. To achieve this, I decided to write the play exclusively from the protagonist's point of view; but, as a result, the other characters in this first draft were flat and unsatisfying. Even after ruthlessly excising material the same problems remained, plus it was then even shorter so that any hope of a full-length play was further lessened. This supports Marsh Cassady's suggestion that one should put aside a finished play for long enough to achieve critical distance without losing interest (190).

At this point that I realised I could re-write the material as a monologue. I have a liking for the highly subjective view a monologue provides, together with the intimacy the character is able to develop with the audience. In the first draft Gary simply recounted all the dialogue; but later I recalled the effectiveness of Tom Scott's *The Daylight Atheist*, in which the narrator fully embodies and impersonates all the characters. I am sure a competent actor would have enlivened each character anyway, but this forces him to do so; also it eliminates clumsy clauses denoting who said what. One dilemma I had to solve was concerned with the episodic nature of the play. Scene changes would have been impractical for a play of this length, and pauses would have slowed the pace; so I compromised by indicating a "snap blackout" between episodes, with changes in setting conveyed through subtle "visual suggestions."

Placing a disabled character at the centre of a work of literature is rare, and giving him/her an articulate voice even more so. Models such as *The Miracle Worker*, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* and *Keeping Tom Nice* all present the disabled protagonist simply as someone for whom one should feel pity, and focus more on how the people around them cope. Although Lucy Gannon gives the severely disabled Tom his own voice in *Keeping Tom Nice*, it is only

in garbled stream-of-consciousness style. My play attempts to break down stereotypical perceptions of disabled people – such as that if their body does not function properly, their mind doesn't either. Also, as far as activities for the disabled are concerned, the public automatically thinks that wheelchair sport is their main aspiration – another preconception undermined in the play. Thus, the notion that a disabled person may wish to participate in the theatre is one which the average audience member may not necessarily have considered. Additionally, even after being presented with this proposition, audiences may assume that a disabled person would consider specially-designed theatre groups sufficient. My play asks what happens if this is not the case.

Although this play is a monologue, I have taken care to present the various predicaments from all the characters' points of view. For example, the play does not denigrate the worth of theatre groups which are specifically designed for the disabled; it simply leaves unresolved the question of what happens when this solution does not fulfil a desire. Similarly, although we witness Gary's desperate struggle to become an actor, the play presents the theatre professionals who try to help him achieve this goal in an equally favourable light, recognising that they too face a predicament. To enhance this, I made sure these theatre professionals are often written even more sympathetically than Gary; Gary's dialogue is full of dramatic irony where the audience is conscious that he does not fully appreciate their guidance. Indeed, Gary may not possess the acting talent he believes he has; the point the play is making is that he cannot prove whether or not this is the case. Audiences may say, "If he cannot prove it, and he can never fulfil his dream, he must compromise." However, the play explores what happens when someone simply cannot bring themselves to do this – perseverance in the face of impossibility.

Thus the framework of the play – which reveals through the device of Gary’s secret alter ego that what appears to be ‘real’ is often imagined and vice versa – performs two functions. Firstly, it makes both the psychology and the theatrical style of the monologue more complex by revealing that Gary has in fact been talking about himself in the third person; he thus creates enough artificial distance to be able to talk about his experiences. Secondly, this device continues the method of presenting unconventional problems without attempting to provide satisfactory solutions. Gary sees developing an alter ego, and living secret fantasies through him, as the only way left for him to proceed. The play again makes no judgements about this and draws no conclusions, but simply presents the predicament.

A wonderful by-product of this play is that it facilitates the very goal of the protagonist. It gives an actor who is disabled a rare opportunity to play a complex lead role in a production. One can infer from this that perhaps the ideal solution to the central problem that people such as Gary Gray face, is for playwrights to create demanding parts which disabled actors could play in mainstream productions.

My chilling, anti-bureaucratic satire *Three Bags Full* was inspired by Samuel Beckett’s *Rough For Theatre II*, in which two bureaucrats leisurely consult testimonials in order to decide whether or not to let a third man jump out of a window. Beckett’s work, with its bleak world view, is largely concerned with depicting people’s inability to get on with one another, and is also concerned with the loss of individual identity in the face of oppressive social forces. My goal was to incorporate these elements into *Three Bags Full*.

As with Beckett’s *Rough For Theatre II*, viewers are not immediately aware of what is taking place in my play – or with whom – until a picture is gradually built up. While Beckett’s play has the bureaucrats merely discussing the third man, mine has them ruthlessly

interrogating him. Roger Hall warns of the flatness of overly “nice” dialogue in drama; but the nastiness of my dialogue is precisely what makes it entertaining (52). Smiley and Burt confirm my view that, “The job of the dramatist is to create an object, not persuade a crowd” (83). In its ruthlessness, my play more closely resembles McCann and Goldberg’s interrogation of Stanley in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*. In my play as well as the two I have cited, audiences are never entirely aware why exactly this interrogation is taking place, but this adds to the mystery and horror of the piece.

To make my play edgier and more modern than Beckett’s I further emulated Pinter, with his menacing dialogue and pregnant pauses. This contributed to the play’s futuristic feel which is entirely my own, and which I heightened through the inclusion of disturbing theatrical devices such as the high-voltage gun to illustrate the ruthlessness of bureaucracy. When contextualising this flexibility of theatricality, Smiley and Burt observe, “A play isn’t ‘mock-life’; rather it produces a world of its own as organised entity (100). As such, *Three Bags Full* mixes the familiar and the unfamiliar by dealing with the universal theme of the resilience of the human spirit in a foreign, futuristic setting.

In Pinter’s play all the characters are given names and, in Beckett’s play, none; so I decided to use a combination of these and only give a name to the man being persecuted. This reinforces my central theme that people with an individual identity are subsumed by nameless forces. Smiley and Burt encourage playwrights to “...[be] rebellious enough to attack all forces of dehumanisation”, which is the main purpose of my play (294). A quirk of Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* is that McCann and Goldberg’s interrogation of Stanley is comprised of ridiculously trivial questions; although this adds to the humour of the play, I cannot help but feel that it diminishes its power because the interrogators become increasingly hard to take seriously. To prevent this occurring in my play, I have my interrogators ask

James much more serious questions which invade the dark recesses of his psyche. The title, *Three Bags Full*, alludes to the deferential line from the nursery rhyme “Baa Baa Black Sheep”, “Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.” This relates to my text because my named character, James, is comically unable to resist being deferential even when most defiant, adding to the feeling that he has been brainwashed. Also, the number in the title subtly reinforces the fact that my play is a three-hander.

This play is made all the more terrifying in that it is littered with dark comedy. As Ayckbourn puts it, “The darker the subject, the more light you must try to shed on the matter” (3). In my play for instance, the way in which the interrogators revel in persecuting the individual is flamboyantly theatrical, verbally choreographed, and modelled on Albee’s *The Play About the Baby*. Like the man and woman in Albee’s play, my interrogators work together in a jovial, polished routine which is juxtaposed with the seriousness of the situation. The crucial difference however is that in Albee’s play the older couple intimidates the younger couple in order to steal their baby whereas, in my play and all the other models I have cited, the interrogators’ motivations remain troublingly unknown. This highlights the central theme of both my play and Beckett’s *Rough For Theatre II*, that societies should be wary of implementing bureaucracy for its own sake at the expense of the human spirit.

Soapbox came about because I always wanted to write a parody of the clichéd story-lines upon which soap operas rely. My first instinct was to depict these scenes being acted, but I discounted this on the grounds that it would just look like a bad attempt at trying to write a soap opera, and also may become repetitive. I decided to focus instead on another theme, the downside of creative collaboration. The focus would shift from the soap opera actors to the writers. This put me in mind of a David Mamet play, *Squirrels*, in which two collaborators spend more time arguing about why each other’s ideas are flawed than actually achieving

anything. My thought was that it would be ideal if I could replicate this theme while writing a scathing indictment of soap operas in the process. However, there were several flaws in my first draft. Being two full-time writers, the idea that my characters would be inept at their job and lose concentration lacked believability. Noël Greig warns that, “...whatever we invest a character with, it has to be credible” (15). So either I had to make the characters more able – in which case the humour of the play would disappear – or they had to be amateur writers.

Accordingly, I revised the play so that the two characters were now students who believed – even though nobody else would probably agree – that they had a talent for script-writing. Like Art and Ed in *Squirrels*, my characters have big dreams but they are not particularly good at carrying them out. As *Squirrels* is a full-length play, Mamet adds the quirky character of the cleaning woman with whom the two men interact; but because mine is a short play, I could afford to concentrate exclusively on the relationship between the two young men, without this same need for variety.

However, even after revising the draft, I found that my two characters were still not distinctive enough. Noël Greig in particular stresses the importance of giving characters their own idiolect (149). It occurred to me that embracing Mamet’s sharp street slang would improve both of these aspects. While Mamet creates differentiation and conflict between the characters in *Squirrels* by having the scenario of the inexperienced writer working with a mentor, I achieve a similar dynamic by making Mike more eloquent and better educated than Ollie. One criticism I have of *Squirrels* is that the stakes are never high, so I made a point of giving my characters an urgent motivation for finishing the script – the need to pay rent.

All these changes added depth to the play and established greater conflict, but I was still unsatisfied by the ending; and, again, I felt unsatisfied by the ending of Mamet’s *Squirrels* for

the very same reason. Even with the tension created by the pair's constant arguing and lack of productivity, I felt that there needed to be escalation towards a climax and a confrontation. Still focusing on Mamet's style, I realised that the ending of another play, *American Buffalo* – where the characters' petty arguing leads to unnecessary destruction – was exactly the sort of conclusion I was looking for. In *American Buffalo* Teach, who regularly preaches the importance of keeping friendship and business separate, hypocritically trashes Don's shop when their get-rich-quick scheme goes wrong. Influenced by this, I had Ollie finally snap, causing an irrational argument to spiral out of control, leading not only to the pointless ruin of creativity but the pointless ruin of a friendship.

Shelf Life was inspired by Alan Bennett's collections of short monologues, *Talking Heads I and II*. Bennett's use of dramatic irony enables viewers to laugh at his characters while sympathising with them at the same time. Aware of this, I made a conscious effort to strike a similar balance between the comic and the tragic in my play.

Unlike *Admit One*, in which Gary embodies and impersonates all the characters, my protagonist in *Shelf Life*, Lavinia Moon, conversationally recounts her story, directly reporting dialogue and taking the audience into her confidence. Unlike Bennett however, I decided to have Lavinia recount her story in the 'historical present', which makes it more immediate. Also, I took pains to make her dialogue less slow, old-fashioned and English in feel than Alan Bennett's. The episodic nature of Bennett's monologues gives them a definite structure and allows for increasing tension. I was careful to emulate this but, unlike in *Admit One*, snap blackouts were unnecessary as there are no scene changes.

My goal was to recreate the essence of Bennett's strong female protagonists, along with the tinge of sadness he brings to all his monologues through poignant subtext. Noël Greig

verifies my awareness that subtext is the strongest text of all (92). Thus, I realised it was important to give Lavinia a unique and memorable character and voice, otherwise there was the danger that the audience may forget her plight in favour of the various boyfriends who are the cause of it. Accordingly, I gave Lavinia a conversational, down-to-earth style and also made her a fashion editor always surrounded by gorgeous young women, which increases her desperation.

Another model for *Shelf Life* was Andrew Lloyd Webber's one-woman musical *Tell Me On a Sunday*, in which the upbeat protagonist Emma has an increasingly disastrous series of relationships and begins to doubt herself. The crucial difference is that *Tell Me On a Sunday* ends optimistically, with Emma coming to value her own independence. My ending is in the style of Bennett – bleak and unresolved.

The first draft of *Far and Away* was called *Home Sweet Home*. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, I was particularly fascinated by the way in which Vladimir and Estragon's entertaining dialogue appears random and trivial but is in fact highly structured and profound. I thought it might be an interesting technical exercise to try to imitate this, while at the same time recontextualising it. I then had the idea of placing two male protagonists in an old-aged home. That way, Beckett's motif of people conversing idly while waiting for something could be mirrored in my play, only with a twist – Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for someone concrete, whereas my two characters could just be waiting for any little spark in their dull days. If my two characters were old and deaf, this would facilitate the imitation of Beckett's awareness of the comedy found in frustrated repetition. As in *Waiting for Godot*, this would give rise to dramatic irony through the audience being more aware of the characters' lack of profundity than they themselves are.

I then wrote what I actually considered to be a fairly solid imitation of Vladimir and Estragon's characteristics and speech patterns; however, the result worried me. What I had created was a work which was very obviously nothing more than a pale imitation of certain elements of *Waiting for Godot*. My two old men were utterly interchangeable and lacked their own goals and obstacles. I realised that if I was going to write an imitation of *Waiting for Godot*, I would have to do what I have always tried to do and go beyond the model, adding several unique touches to make this play my own.

However, when I re-read the dialogue I had written, it felt charming but not gripping. As Ayckbourn neatly phrases it, "Never sell your characters short..." (27) At best, the audience would smile with condescension at my characters; at worst, they would quite rightly think the play was boring. The fact that there was not enough action or plot made me begin to understand why Beckett added two other characters, Pozzo and Lucky. In fact, the first draft of *Home Sweet Home* struck me as uncomfortably similar to the flawed first draft of *Soapbox* – two people who think they have greater insight than they actually do, constantly trying to prove one another wrong, never achieving anything in particular, and never having any real confrontation as a result.

So I completely re-envisioned my play, only retaining the setting of the old-aged home. Fortunately, an interesting plot occurred to me – two old pensioners win money on the horses, after which friends and relatives appear out of the woodwork and gradually deplete them of all their winnings. This gave me the chance to research horse racing and the mathematics and mechanics of placing bets. It also made me wonder why I needed to run the risk of recreating the problem I had in the earlier draft where the two men's characteristics and crises were duplicated. I decided it was only necessary to have one central protagonist, yet I did not wish to turn the play into another monologue. Tension needed to arise from the protagonist Barry

needing the money to achieve some important goal – namely his long-cherished dream of going on a luxury cruise around Hawaii and Tahiti – and other people overtly or covertly telling him how better to spend it.

I took my very first idea of this being a play written for two old male actors, and made it for an old and a young male instead. Then I extended this even further and made the young actor play two roles, Barry's son and nurse. This is the only play in the collection which provides an actor with the challenge of 'doubling' for practical purposes, because these two roles are not sizable enough to warrant two different actors. The combination of old and young allowed conflict of temperaments and world views to arise because of the age gap. Something I learnt from writing this play was that, if you give a character a distinctive way of speaking, it is important to remain consistent. So I made Barry's lower-class accent a real feature of his speech, which served to give him a more unique identity.

References to authentic local settings and events – such as Christchurch and the 2010 earthquake – anchor the play in a specific framework immediately relevant to the country's audiences. Noël Greig advises that location should almost function as another character rather than just a backdrop, so I have made setting integral to this piece (120). This creates the ideal mix of the universal and the specific which Greig discusses, while adding colour to the play by embracing topical local issues (120).

Location is most important in the last scene of the play, when it is revealed that Barry is forced to settle for a whale-watching weekend in Kaikoura. This taught me a valuable lesson in scene-writing. In my initial draft of the scene, the first line was Seymour's comment, "Aaaaaaw, c'mon Barry, Kaikoura's not *that* bad!" While this achieved my goal of humorously revealing this crucial information by showing rather than telling, it meant that the

crux of the scene occurred right at the beginning and so there was no need for any more dialogue; accordingly, the scene decreased in energy. This made me realise that the way to maximise the power of this scene was to create a build-up so that this revelation occurs in the last line rather than the first. This stressed to me the importance of maintaining tension and mystery as long as possible.

The last play in the collection, *Black Widow*, is fundamentally concerned with whether or not it is ever possible to trust someone completely. The protagonist Caroline, with her overbearing personality and devastating game-playing, is modelled on Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Caroline's flamboyant flirtation with the stud Jack in front of his wife Lucy mirrors Martha's behaviour towards Nick. Caroline is a woman who says and does things which the audience would probably only fantasise about – such as ruthlessly toying with Lucy, for whom she feels complete contempt.

One goal of this play is to highlight the thin line between sanity and madness. Although the text hints at the fact that the widowed Caroline destroys Jack and Lucy's lives out of lust, loneliness and bitterness, it seems plausible given her fiercely independent character that she also does it for effect, simply because she can. In the first draft, the last third differed greatly from its current form. After the major confrontation between the three characters over Jack and Caroline's alleged affair, Lucy confronts Caroline and reveals that she knows Caroline's claim is false because Jack has reminded her of insane stunts Caroline has pulled in the past. When asked why she would make such a shocking false claim, Caroline replies, "Because I felt like it." I considered this ending of the play intriguing because the villain is remorseless and triumphant.

However, I ultimately devised an even stronger ending which added an entirely new layer. In it, Jack and Lucy gain revenge by double-crossing Caroline and leaving her in a compromising position. This takes into account Roger Hall's observation that audiences love to see the tables turn (64). This new draft of the play is closely modelled on Anthony Schaffer's cat-and-mouse play *Sleuth*, which begins when Andrew Wyke takes revenge on his wife's young lover Milo Tindle. However, I wanted to make Caroline an even more troubling character than Andrew by having her game-playing motives unknown. Just as Milo retaliates in *Sleuth* by disguising himself as a police inspector and attempting to arrest Andrew, Lucy and Jack's double-crossing of Caroline serves to level the score. As in *Sleuth* a point of crisis was necessary. I added a further twist by concluding my play on an unsettling note, reinforcing my central theme that no-one can ever entirely trust anyone else. Although Jack has done his best to convince Lucy that he is innocent of Caroline's charges, Lucy states that she is willing to believe Jack simply because she could not cope with the alternative. In this respect, Caroline remains the ultimate winner in *Black Widow*.

In conclusion, if I could start the full-length play *Fair Play* again I would pay more attention to planning in the early stages – with regard to structure, as well as character development, motivations, goals and obstacles - before attempting to write dialogue. I now also have a greater awareness that theatre is a visual art and that overt conflict makes solid drama. Having written the short plays after the full-length *Fair Play*, this understanding of the need for in-depth planning and preparation prior to writing was already in place. However, writing the short plays has taught me the importance of variety in characterisation, speech patterns, themes and scenarios. Through these six concentrated pieces especially, I have learned to write concise scenes, with optimum placement of revelations. Completing my MFA in playwriting under the guidance of Christina Stachurski and Howard McNaughton has given me a more mature knowledge of the intricacies of the craft.

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FAIR PLAY

A Play
by
Guy Mulinder

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM VOIGHT: Mid-40s but seems older; thin, bearded, fairly dishevelled.

SHONA VOIGHT: Wife of William; mid-30s, willowy; smartly dressed.

TOBY VOIGHT: Son of William and Shona; 12, overweight; plain, unfashionable clothes (shorts, t-shirt).

NICK SLADE: William's publisher and agent; late 20s, reasonably handsome, lean, clean-shaven, wears glasses; always very dapper, has sex appeal.

CAMERON HOLLIS: William's student; 22, a petite young woman; exceptionally attractive in a subtle way; pretty clothes.

BARBIE HOLLIS: Cameron's mother; early 40s, slim; trendy, overly-youthful clothing.

NB: *BARBIE sports different outfits, hairstyles, nail-polish etc in every scene in which she appears.*

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

[WILLIAM sits at his cluttered desk in his cluttered office. He has an unlit cigarette in his mouth. The phone rings and he answers it.]

WILLIAM: William Voight speaking?... Oh hello, Vice Chancellor, what can I do for you?... Mmm... Right... Um, it's still "in-development", so to speak, um, in the pipeline... Well with all due respect sir, these things take time... Yes... Yes, I understand... I will... Well there's also the undergrad lectures, all the marking, the postgrad supervision-

[There is a knock at the door. WILLIAM conceals the cigarette.]

WILLIAM: *[Shouts]* Er... just a second! *[Back into phone]* Sorry about that sir, someone at my door. Yes, yes, okay, message received... That's fine... You too, thank you sir, goodbye.

[WILLIAM hangs up.]

WILLIAM: *[Mutters]* Bloody wanker. *[Shouts]* Come in.

[CAMERON enters. WILLIAM eyes her up.]

WILLIAM: Hello, can I help you?

CAMERON: Hi, I'm Cameron Hollis.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: You are?

CAMERON: *[Puzzled]* Yes. You're supervising my MFA.

WILLIAM: *[A little too pleased]* Oh, well in that case come in, have a seat!

[CAMERON sits.]

WILLIAM: I'm sorry you have to climb all those stairs to get here.

CAMERON: Oh that's alright.

WILLIAM: I did ask for a different office but the "powers that be" chose to decline. Oh well. Four flights certainly keep me fit. At least they're finally getting around to replacing that rickety old lift.

CAMERON: Pity about that great big gaping hole in the meantime. *[Pause.]* Well, thanks so much for taking me on, Professor Voight!

WILLIAM: It's my pleasure. Please, call me William. And by the way, it's not "Voigghht." It's "Voit." As in Jon. You know? The Midnight Cowboy! Angelina's dad!

CAMERON: O...kay. Is it German?

WILLIAM: *[Sighs]* Yes, apparently.

CAMERON: The least I could do is pronounce it correctly considering your work actually inspired me to start writing plays.

WILLIAM: Oh, come now.

CAMERON: It's true! Your plays should be put on more often.

WILLIAM: *[Bitterly]* I've been telling people that for years. *[Awkward pause.]* But I don't have as much time to work on my own stuff as I'd like now.

CAMERON: Oh. Pity. So when *will* your next play be coming out?

WILLIAM: Oh it's still very much in the pipeline. "In-development", so to speak. *[Pause.]* I see you got a full scholarship.

CAMERON: Yes.

WILLIAM: Congratulations!

CAMERON: Thanks. If I can do well enough in my MFA, hopefully I'll get a scholarship for my PhD too, which would help a lot.

WILLIAM: Got it all planned out huh?

CAMERON: Mm-hm.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Any idea what you want your play to be about?

CAMERON: Well... I figured you can never go far wrong with a good old "dysfunctional family" play can you? The loonier the better, right? Because let's face it, there's nothing more satisfying than watching people tearing each other apart!

[WILLIAM looks at her a little oddly.]

CAMERON: *[Hastily]* In the... theatre I mean! Ha, there's my dark side coming out!

WILLIAM: No, that sounds good! Conflict conflict conflict! Do you have a title in mind?

CAMERON: *The Chrysanthemum Man.*

WILLIAM: Intriguing! How does it relate back?

CAMERON: *[Smiles]* I don't know yet, I'll figure that out later!

WILLIAM: *[Chuckles]* Fair enough. Never let the story get in the way of a good title, hm?

CAMERON: Exactly!

WILLIAM: Maybe you could bounce some ideas off people.

CAMERON: *[Shakes head]* Mm-mm. This year, I don't want to show my play to anyone at all except you until it's finished.

WILLIAM: *[Fishing]* Not even your... boyfriend?

CAMERON: *[Awkwardly]* I, um... I don't have a boyfriend.

WILLIAM: *[A little too pleased]* Oh! I see!

CAMERON: None of my *friends* are even going to see it!

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Is.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: Pardon?

WILLIAM: None is. Not. One. Is.

CAMERON: Oh. Right. Sorry.

WILLIAM: That's alright! *[Pause.]* Well, we'll meet same time next week to discuss it shall we?

CAMERON: Sure! Is that all for today then?

WILLIAM: I think so.

CAMERON: Great! Well, nice meeting you! And thanks again!

[WILLIAM pats CAMERON's hand.]

WILLIAM: My pleasure!

[CAMERON pulls away uncomfortably, but smiles politely as she exits. WILLIAM breathes deeply and rubs his eyes. He puts the unlit cigarette in his mouth again.]

SCENE 2

[WILLIAM's lounge. He has an unlit cigarette in his mouth.]

NICK: Old man, how many times have I asked you please not to smoke in my presence!

WILLIAM: It's. Never. Lit. I haven't smoked in over six months!

NICK: Good for you old man! Really! But, um... still, would you mind, um?... *[gestures.]*

[WILLIAM gives NICK a cynical look, and conceals the cigarette.]

WILLIAM: Henpecked by Shona and now you!

NICK: So have things not improved between you and Shona?

WILLIAM: Does it sound like it?

[Awkward pause.]

NICK: So! How's life in the ivory tower old man?

WILLIAM: How do you think? They're now installing all these new computer programme thingamajigs to make things "easier"! So now all the lecturers, who should be the ones *giving* seminars, have to *attend* them. "Team learning" they're calling it! Mind you, speaking of seminars, I asked my undergrads today, "Can anyone tell me some human emotions we might feel?" And one little bugger yells out, "Boredom!"

[WILLIAM and NICK chuckle, a little sadly.]

WILLIAM: How's business?

NICK: Well you know, it's funny. People just don't seem to be writing marketable stuff at the moment. I mean, even *I'm* struggling to find things worth publishing and you know me, I *never* use the 's' word! But I refuse to let it get me down. It's all about attitude, old man!

WILLIAM: Yes well you certainly have one of those.

NICK: When I wake up in the morning, I try to think of at least three reasons why life is faaaaaan-tasmalistic!

WILLIAM: And then you give up?

NICK: I never give up!

WILLIAM: *[Sighing]* Nope. You sure don't.

NICK: And nor should you, old man! In fact, this is exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. I finally got around to reading that overview you sent me before term started. Of your idea for a new play. Pity it couldn't be the finished product, but...

WILLIAM: [*Grumpily*] Well your nagging was so relentless I *had* to give you *something* to shut you up didn't I?

NICK: Hey! Give us a smile there, old man! "A smile is a curve which sets a lot of things straight"!

[*WILLIAM shakes his head.*]

NICK: Well I can't tell you what a joy it is to see that our local hero has finally been putting pen to paper again.

WILLIAM: "Local" being the operative word.

NICK: Aaaaaw, c'mon William, people *love* your stuff, you know that! Far more than all those... intellectual plays.

[*WILLIAM gives NICK a look. Pause.*]

NICK: [*Brightly*] So, tell me! Are you getting enough time to write?

WILLIAM: Write?! Write?! No university lecturer ever gets enough time to write! And meanwhile the V.C. sits there in his little cocoon. [*Pompous impersonation*] "As we all know William, the university's been having some rather... unfortunate press lately. And a new play from you would be just the sort of promotion we need!"

NICK: Huh! Maybe he's not as green as he's cabbage-looking! [*Pause.*] Well hurry up old man! I could really use that ten per cent right about now! Speaking strictly as your agent of course.

[*WILLIAM looks at NICK cynically. Pause.*]

WILLIAM: Well? What did you *think* of the overview?

NICK: Oh it's very interesting!

WILLIAM: [*Dryly*] Sure.

NICK: It is! It's... just such a pity it isn't... up to your usual standard.

[*WILLIAM gives NICK a withering look. Pause.*]

WILLIAM: [*Icily*] What d'you mean?

NICK: Well, none of it... rings true, there's no... depth to it, the characters' motivations are utterly... inexplicable.

WILLIAM: And you'd know of course.

NICK: Old man, I am an audience member like anybody else. And what's more I'm a publisher and an agent. I know what sells. So you just keep working away at it old man!

[WILLIAM takes out the cigarette and puts it back in his mouth, despite NICK's looks of protest. NICK hands the overview to WILLIAM and takes his hand, which WILLIAM shakes half-heartedly.]

NICK: Here. I've written some detailed feedback. I'm sure that if you follow my suggestions, you'll have a much more coherent idea all round.

[WILLIAM looks at NICK with distaste.]

NICK: *[Exiting]* And even if you *don't*, you could always... come up with a different idea! There's no hurry, just don't take too long.

[NICK exits. Once WILLIAM has recovered, he starts tearing up the overview.]

SCENE 3

[BARBIE's salon.

NB: *BARBIE sports different outfits, hairstyles, nail-polish etc in every scene in which she appears.*

In theory, BARBIE is cutting SHONA's hair, but mostly just waves the comb and scissors enthusiastically as she chatters away.]

BARBIE: Oh so you're an estate agent are you Shona? Ooooooh what fun.

SHONA: I am a Property Marketing Operative.

BARBIE: Wow! Very flash! *[Pause.]* My daughter and I only have a small little house but it's comfy and cosy and it's ours. One day she'll have a *huge* house with a Jacuzzi! She's a bright button!

SHONA: *[Dryly]* Is that a fact.

BARBIE: She's doing her Masters in playwriting! At the *university*!

[SHONA turns, and freezes.]

SHONA: *[Groans]* You've *got* to be kidding.

BARBIE: *[Misunderstanding]* Yeah, isn't it amazing!

SHONA: Locked away with some boring old fart is she?

BARBIE: Well... she has this prof... who she really takes the Mickey out of. Oh, it's such a hoot, wish you could see it.

SHONA: *[Dryly]* I wish I could too! *[Mutters]* A woman playwright?!

BARBIE: In fact! She's at his house right now doing some work *there*! Because he's not feeling too well at the moment poor man, and they have to climb four flights of stairs to get to his office! Cameron was a little bit nervous about going there of course, but I said to her, "Don't be silly, Cammy. This is too good a chance to miss! So you just make bloody sure you plant both feet as firmly in the door as possible my girl! And the rest of you!"

[SHONA briskly fishes money out of her purse and starts to rise.]

SHONA: Yes, well... thanks Barbara.

BARBIE: Barbie. Hey, hang about, I've hardly cut anything yet!

SHONA: No no, trust me, you've been very, *very* helpful!

[BARBIE holds up a hand-mirror and moves it about.]

BARBIE: But what about-?

SHONA: No, nothing! Er, thank you.

BARBIE: Not even a-?

SHONA: No!!

BARBIE: *[Calling after her]* Well, um... have a nice day Shona!

[SHONA hurries out of the salon.]

SCENE 4

[WILLIAM's lounge. WILLIAM and CAMERON are each holding drafts of CAMERON's work.]

WILLIAM: This is fairly good work by and large Cameron. If you'd consider making the changes I've suggested, it'll be much tighter.

CAMERON: *[Doubtfully]* O...kay...

WILLIAM: But I'm not *forcing* you to change it!

CAMERON: *[Doubtfully]* Right...

WILLIAM: The most important thing is, always stay true to yourself!

[WILLIAM ruffles CAMERON's hair and she pulls away. There is a banging at the front door and WILLIAM goes off to answer it.]

WILLIAM: *[Off-stage, shouts]* Toby, your mum's here!

[WILLIAM re-enters with SHONA.]

WILLIAM: *[With a gesture]* Shona, this is my student Cameron Hollis. Cameron, this is my... this is Shona.

SHONA: Ah. "Home schooling" are we Willy?

WILLIAM: I wasn't feeling well enough to go into varsity this morning.

SHONA: You seem fine to me.

WILLIAM: Lots of things seem fine to you when they're not, Shona. And lots of things *don't* seem fine to you when they *are*. So! If that's all...

[TOBY enters.]

TOBY: Hi mum!

SHONA: Hello darling!

[SHONA hugs TOBY. TOBY sees CAMERON for the first time.]

WILLIAM: Toby, this is my student Cameron.

[Throughout the next exchange TOBY stares open-mouthed at CAMERON, which she obviously finds discomforting.]

SHONA: Toby, close your mouth.

[TOBY is staring too intently at CAMERON to hear SHONA.]

SHONA: Well I might as well pick up my billboards while I'm here, you haven't felt the need to... move them or... "tidy up" or anything have you?

WILLIAM: No, they're still taking up all the room in the garage like everything else. And now we have some work we need to finish. Don't we Cameron?

SHONA: Yes, I'll bet you have.

WILLIAM: You sure you can't stay dear?

CAMERON: *[Rising]* Um, perhaps I'd better go too-

TOBY: *[Involuntarily]* No!

[CAMERON sits again, awkwardly.]

SHONA: Well *someone* obviously thinks you're "finished" Willy.

CAMERON: *[Rising]* Yes.

WILLIAM: Please stay where you are for a minute Cameron-

TOBY: *[Involuntarily]* Yes!

[CAMERON sits again, awkwardly.]

SHONA: And I trust you've given this poor girl the whole, "And by the way, it's not "Voigghht." It's "Voit." As in null and."

[SHONA turns and leaves the house on her high horse, making the most of her moment in the limelight, slamming the door behind her. WILLIAM glances apologetically at CAMERON and exits, running after SHONA. TOBY is still staring open-mouthed at CAMERON.]

WILLIAM: *[Off-stage, faintly]* What the hell is the matter with you Shona?

[Long pause.]

CAMERON: What's your favourite subject at school Toby?

TOBY: *[Confidently]* Lunch!

[CAMERON laughs awkwardly. Long pause.]

CAMERON: *[Polite, awkward laughter]* Um...

TOBY: Hey! D-d-d-d-you want to... you know... um.... you know... er... go out to a movie or something... sometime?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: *[Flatly]* No thanks.

[Pause.]

TOBY: Well, um, er... Hey! I'll show you my new move!

CAMERON: I've just seen your new move. Did you father teach you that one?

TOBY: No no, my... my n-n-new k-k-karate move.

[TOBY does it, with full actions and sound effects. Pause.]

CAMERON: *[Deadpan]* Right.

TOBY: Hey! If you come upstairs I'll, I'll... I'll show you how I can play drums.

CAMERON: I think I'll pass.

[Pause.]

TOBY: Cameron's a bit of a weird name for a girl.

CAMERON: Thanks. *[Pause.]* It's one of the many things I haven't quite forgiven my mother for! And Toby's a bit of a weird name for a boy!

TOBY: Yeah, well I hate that too. Dad says he chose it because it sounds "distinguished." Whatever the hell that means.

[WILLIAM returns, this time with BARBIE. CAMERON looks appalled.]

CAMERON: Mum! What are you doing here?

BARBIE: *[Distracted, eyeing up WILLIAM]* Oh I just thought I'd... swing by and... pick you up. *[To WILLIAM]* Such an honour, Prof.

WILLIAM: Please, call me William.

BARBIE: Oh no, I'd far rather call you Prof, Prof. "Voight." Is that German?

WILLIAM: *[Sighs]* Yes, apparently. And it's not "Voigghht." It's "Voit." As in Jon. You know? The Midnight Cowboy! Angelina's dad!

BARBIE: Oh! Begging your pardon Prof!

WILLIAM: This is my son Toby.

BARBIE: Nice to meet you love!

WILLIAM: *[To CAMERON]* Sorry about the incident earlier by the way. *[To BARBIE]* My wife put on one of her famous firework displays.

BARBIE: Your wife?

WILLIAM: Well, in a manner of speaking. She and I are having a trial separation.

BARBIE: Oh I'm sorry to hear that, Prof.

WILLIAM: Don't be. The marriage was the trial, the separation's bliss!

[They laugh.]

BARBIE: *[Huskily]* I'm divorced myself!

CAMERON: *[Clenched teeth]* Mum!

TOBY: *[To BARBIE]* I was wondering, can I take your daughter out? She said no, so I think she wanted me to ask you first.

BARBIE: *[Laughing]* Young man, let's go over there for a minute, I want to whisper something to you.

[BARBIE gestures to a far corner of the room.]

CAMERON: *[Through clenched teeth]* Um, what are you doing?

BARBIE: Relax love, it's nothing to worry about.

[BARBIE gently propels TOBY to the far corner of the room, and she whispers something in his ear. The doorbell rings.]

WILLIAM: Goodness, I *am* popular today!

[WILLIAM goes off to answer it, and re-enters shortly after with NICK. NICK flashes a pearly-white grin at CAMERON, who manages a faint half-smile in return.]

CAMERON: Mum, I really think we should go now.

WILLIAM: No, you don't need to. *[Hissed, to NICK]* I told you I'd have a student here this afternoon!

NICK: *[Winks; aloud]* Why do you think I came? My God William, I can see why you love your job! You know old man, I could really use a cup of tea right about now.

[WILLIAM shakes his head and doesn't move.]

NICK: *[To CAMERON, handing her his business card. Seductively.]* Well, hello! I'm in the publishing business! Always on the lookout for... new talent! Hopefully if William does his job properly, you and I can... see a lot more of each other.

CAMERON: I... don't think so somehow. Come on mum, let's go.

NICK: *[Turning to Barbie]* You mean you're her mother? I assumed you were her sister!

BARBIE: Oy! *[Clicks fingers]* Big shot! Enough.

WILLIAM: *[Apologetically]* This is my publisher and agent, Nick Slade.

BARBIE: Well I'd watch out for that one if I were you Prof. He's all gong and very little dinner by the look of him.

NICK: My dear, I think we may've got off on the wrong foot-

BARBIE: We haven't "got off" at all! Right Cammy, let's go. *[Pointedly]* Nice meeting some of you!

NICK: Now wait a minute!...

[CAMERON and BARBIE exit, NICK chases after them. WILLIAM riffles through CAMERON's draft again and shakes his head in admiration.]

WILLIAM: *[Hushed awe]* Wow!

TOBY: *[Misunderstanding]* Yeah, wow!

WILLIAM: What?

TOBY: She's the *one*, dad!

WILLIAM: Who? Barbie? Hmmmm...

TOBY: No. Cameron! I'm in love!

WILLIAM: So I gathered, you practically proposed to her!

TOBY: She's smoking hot isn't she?

WILLIAM: I couldn't say.

TOBY: Yes you could!

WILLIAM: No no, you know what I mean. I've told you I can't discuss my students.

TOBY: Ah! That means yes!

WILLIAM: No. It. Does. Not.

[While WILLIAM pours himself a drink TOBY takes out a walkman and starts listening to it, dancing and moving his head up and down in time to the music. After a few moments he takes an earphone off one ear.]

TOBY: So is her stuff any good?

WILLIAM: Well I sure wish I'd had some of her ideas! Even one!

TOBY: So it *is* good then?

WILLIAM: *[Guarded]* I... didn't say that.

[TOBY puts the earphone back on. WILLIAM mutters exasperatedly to TOBY but more to himself.]

WILLIAM: No, it's not good, it's so fucking amazing it makes me sick!

[TOBY takes the earphone off again.]

TOBY: What did you say?

WILLIAM: *[Sighing]* Nothing, nothing.

TOBY: So are you helping her get a good mark then?

WILLIAM: *[Darkly]* I'm helping her get... exactly what she deserves.

TOBY: *[Not registering the double-meaning]* Cool! *[Pause.]* Can I ask you a random question?

WILLIAM: *[Sighs]* No. But you can ask me a *question*.

TOBY: Do you think if I wrote her a letter, you could maybe-

WILLIAM: No I most certainly could not!

TOBY: Aaaaaaw but dad-

WILLIAM: No! And anyway, I wouldn't have thought she'd be your type Toby, she's got all her clothes on.

TOBY: You're just jealous of all my posters. Want some?

WILLIAM: *[Chuckling]* Thanks, but the real thing is better. *[Mutters]* Or at least it *was*.

[Pause.]

TOBY: And d'you know what the absolute totally hottest thing of all is?

WILLIAM: What?

TOBY: What her mum told me. Cameron's gay!

[WILLIAM's face says it all. TOBY runs off. WILLIAM sighs heavily, takes out a cigarette, doesn't light it, but puts it in his mouth.]

SCENE 5

[BARBIE's lounge.]

BARBIE: You have to look on the Prof's help as a real blessing.

CAMERON: Alright, alright.

BARBIE: I mean, even *I've* heard of him! *[Pause]* But that doesn't mean you can't butter him up now and again! He is a man after all. And believe it or not, profs are only human.

CAMERON: And you'd know that from personal experience would you? *[BARBIE looks hurt. Pause.]* Well it's pretty obvious *you've* got your eye on him.

BARBIE: So?

CAMERON: He's my Prof, get your own.

BARBIE: Maybe I will. He liked me, you were there!

CAMERON: He was being polite.

BARBIE: No he wasn't, I could see it in his eyes. And anyway, why *shouldn't* he like me? I might invite him over one night.

CAMERON: Don't. You. Dare. It would just be... odd.

BARBIE: Oh, odd-shmod!

CAMERON: What would you talk about?

BARBIE: Well... books.

CAMERON: *[Guffawing]* You've never read anything in your life!

BARBIE: I have so!

CAMERON: *Woman's Weekly* doesn't count. I'm talking about the classics... *[Wistfully]* Oscar Wilde.

BARBIE: Oh love, you know I don't go in for adventure stories! No no, he and I could live it up now, and then he could read to me when we get... older! Women of a... "certain age" want security, you know. And apart from anything else, if I can smooth-talk the Prof now it'll get you a good mark!

CAMERON: No! No way!

BARBIE: Oh Cammy, why are you always so boring?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: William's *wife's* a fascinating woman!

BARBIE: What do you mean, was she there too?

CAMERON: Oh yes, she left before anyone else arrived.

BARBIE: *[Clicks tongue]* So incon-bloody-siderate.

CAMERON: She's extremely... charismatic!

BARBIE: *[Knowingly]* Oh yes?

[CAMERON gives BARBIE a drop-dead look.]

CAMERON: She really gave William the run around, it was so great to watch!

BARBIE: I see. *[Cruel impersonation]* “A faaaaaaaascinating woman! Extreeeeeeeemely charismatic! Greeeeeeeat to watch!”

CAMERON: You don’t even have to *try* to be annoying do you?

BARBIE: So his son and his publisher both fancy you, and you fancy his wife! Ha!

CAMERON: I do not fancy her! That’s just your vivid imagination.

BARBIE: No no no, a mother can sense these things! Well then we’d better make sure I snap up William before they get back together!

CAMERON: Oh give it a rest, I know absolutely nothing *about* her!

BARBIE: You don’t have to know anything about someone to think they’re attractive. In fact most of the time they’re probably more attractive if you *don’t* know anything about them!

CAMERON: And nothing would ever come of it, she’s straight anyway.

BARBIE: How do you know? Maybe that’s why she left William! Did you ever think of that?

CAMERON: Well... no, I... I didn’t!

BARBIE: Well! There you go! So what does she look like?

CAMERON: Elegant, smart, you know.

BARBIE: What’s her name?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: *[Lying]* I, um... didn’t catch it.

BARBIE: *[Winks]* Of course you didn’t.

SCENE 6

[WILLIAM is working in his office. Both the floor and his desk are littered with envelopes. He has an unlit cigarette in his mouth. There is a rat-tatta-tat-tat at the door. He conceals the cigarette.]

WILLIAM: Come in.

[BARBIE bounces in. WILLIAM looks up from writing addresses on the envelopes.]

WILLIAM: Oh, er... Mrs Hollis, what an unexpected pleasure!

BARBIE: Aaaaw Prof, “Mrs Hollis” makes me sound about three hundred and twelve. And anyway it’s Ms. But call me Barbie!

WILLIAM: Well, um... have a seat Barbie.

BARBIE: Is this a bad time?

WILLIAM: No, I have a little while.

[BARBIE sits. She gestures at all the envelopes.]

BARBIE: Aha! Is that all your fan-mail, Prof?

WILLIAM: *[Chuckling]* I wish! We really should have secretaries to do all the admin but... *[shrugs.]*

BARBIE: Oh, poor you. Well I’ll try not to be too long. I’m sorry to drop in on you like this Prof! Oh and speaking of dropping in, what’s the deal with that Black Hole of Calcutta? Is that how you get rid of all the *other* profs?

WILLIAM: Oh, they’re finally replacing the lift. *[Pause.]* Anyway. What did you want to see me about?

BARBIE: Oh Cammy would kill me if she knew I was here. She told me to keep my big fat nose out. *[Thrusts her nose towards him.]* But I think it’s a lovely nose and I’ll put it where I like! *[Pause.]* So. How’s she doing?

WILLIAM: Well she certainly has potential.

BARBIE: She never lets me see anything, so...

WILLIAM: No, I know.

BARBIE: But she says this is different to anything she’s ever done before.

WILLIAM: Different from.

BARBIE: *[Louder, thinking he hasn’t heard her]* Yes, to anything she’s ever *done* before! *[Pause.]* Well with such a gifted and sensitive man helping her, she can’t possibly go wrong.

WILLIAM: *[Sheepishly]* Oh, well...

BARBIE: I wish *I* was an “artiste” of some kind but...

WILLIAM: Well I’m sure you have other, um... attributes.

BARBIE: Oh I do Prof, I do!

WILLIAM: Cameron tells me you're a hairdresser. Well that's an art form.

BARBIE: Aaaaaw, you're too kind. Well, I'd give you a haircut on the house any time.

WILLIAM: Thank you very much!

BARBIE: Tell me Prof, are you free this Saturday by any chance?

WILLIAM: This Saturday, well, I um...

BARBIE: We're having a... *[guffaws]* barbie! Nothing big, just a few... *[huskily]* close friends. And we'd so love it if you could come!

WILLIAM: Oh, well that's most kind of you and I would've loved to. Really! But I'm actually, um... flying up North for the weekend to, um... give a talk on a paper I've just written.

[BARBIE looks blank, then nods her head several times with vigorous enthusiasm.]

BARBIE: Oh! Oh, well, um... best of luck with that, Prof! Such a pity you can't come though. Because it's a well-known fact that the meat on a barbie really sizzles!

WILLIAM: *[A startled laugh]* I'm, um... quite sure it does.

BARBIE: Oh well, I'll leave you in peace then, Prof. If you ever... *want* me... for anything...

[BARBIE gives a little wave and slinks out. WILLIAM sighs deeply, and takes the cigarette out again. The phone rings.]

WILLIAM: William Voight speaking?... Good morning, Vice Chancellor... The play?... Well I'm about, um, half-way through... Yes, only half-way I'm afraid... Some positive press, yes, we certainly *could*... Mm... Sorry sir, you'd like a what?... An overview?... Um, well, when you say detailed, just how detailed are we talking?... Oh, *that* much!... By when sir?... End of the week?!... But that's... Yes you're right sir, there are a lot of hours in three days... Okay sir, I'll write it down, fire away....

[WILLIAM makes no effort to write anything down.]

WILLIAM: ...Sorry, you wanted a plot outline, character motivations, dialogue excerpts, and what was the other thing? Okay sir, I'll do my very best!... Pardon?... Quite right, I'll do *better* than my very best... Right... Thank you sir... Goodbye.

[WILLIAM hangs up. He picks up the receiver again and slams it down several times, then sighs heavily.]

SCENE 7

[NICK's lounge.]

NICK: So old man, spill the beans!

WILLIAM: I can't stand that expression.

NICK: What did you come round for? Or did you just crave the pleasure of my company?

WILLIAM: Do you by any chance still have a copy of that overview I sent you? The one you so clinically shot down?

NICK: Why do you ask, old man?

WILLIAM: Oh because the little tin god who runs our beloved university is nagging the hell out of me for an overview almost as much as *you* did, and I need to get the prick off my case. He never used to give a toss whether I was coming or going until it occurred to him that a new play may somehow magically get the university out of the shit!

NICK: But surely *you'd* still have a copy old man?

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Look, do you have one or not?

NICK: What happened to the one I gave you with all that feedback?

WILLIAM: I... can't find it.

NICK: Hmm... I wonder why. *[Sighing]* I'll email you my copy.

WILLIAM: Thanks Nick, you're a... Thanks.

NICK: I'll bet you're not even writing the bloody thing at all are you? You've scrapped the whole idea haven't you? That would just be *so* like you!

WILLIAM: *[Shrugs]* That would be telling.

SCENE 8

[Outside a house. SHONA is standing on the path holding a clipboard. CAMERON enters the scene.]

SHONA: *[Not friendly]* Oh. Hello there. What a surprise. Um... Cameron isn't it?

CAMERON: Yes, hello Mrs Voight!

SHONA: *[With distaste]* Shona, if you don't mind.

CAMERON: Shona.

[CAMERON stares admiringly at SHONA.]

SHONA: *[Abruptly]* Well? How can I help you?

CAMERON: Um, it's to do with this house really.

[Pause.]

SHONA: *[Almost not comprehending]* This... house?

CAMERON: Yes, we saw it online, we're thinking of buying it. Well not me of course, my mum is.

[Pause.]

SHONA: Your mum's thinking of buying *this* house?

CAMERON: Yes! What's wrong with that?

SHONA: Well nothing, but I mean... it has six bedrooms and it's miles away from the varsity.

CAMERON: Well I'm sorry, I always thought estate agents tried to *sell* houses!

SHONA: Um, well, they do. And it's "Property Marketing Operatives" by the way. *[Pause.]* Well. If your mother's interested in the house, where is she?

CAMERON: Oh she's at work.

SHONA: Ah. Well why don't we just give her a buzz quickly.

CAMERON: Um, that's probably not the best idea. She, um... she doesn't take private calls at work.

SHONA: Wow, she *must* be important. O...kay, well put down her *home* number then.

[SHONA hands her clipboard to CAMERON.]

CAMERON: Oh she's, um... she's hardly ever *at* home.

SHONA: Doesn't she have a cellphone?

CAMERON: Well yes but it's almost always turned off.

SHONA: Interesting. So how exactly is anyone supposed to get hold of her?

CAMERON: Yes, um... good question!

[CAMERON stares admiringly at SHONA.]

CAMERON: Tell you what, I'll give you *my* cellphone number, how does that sound?

SHONA: *[Shrugs]* Whatever you say.

[CAMERON stares admiringly at SHONA.]

CAMERON: Maybe you and I could, um... get together for a drink or something sometime and, er... discuss it!

[SHONA gives CAMERON a strange look. CAMERON writes on the clipboard.]

CAMERON: Right well that's wonderful, thanks so much!

[CAMERON stares admiringly at SHONA.]

SHONA: You, um... you haven't seen the house yet.

CAMERON: No! No well I'm, er... I'm looking forward to it.

[SHONA and CAMERON exit.]

SCENE 9

[BARBIE's lounge. BARBIE is sitting on the couch reading Woman's Weekly.]

BARBIE: *[Shouts]* Cameron!

CAMERON: *[Off-stage]* What?

BARBIE: Come here now!

CAMERON: *[Off-stage]* Why?

BARBIE: Now!!

[CAMERON enters.]

CAMERON: What?

BARBIE: "What?" yourself.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: Well?

BARBIE: Come and sit down here for a minute.

CAMERON: Now? But I'm busy writing!

BARBIE: I want to talk to you about something.

CAMERON: What?

BARBIE: Sit. Down.

[CAMERON sighs and sits.]

CAMERON: Mm-hm?

BARBIE: Where exactly were you this afternoon?

CAMERON: I was "exactly" at uni. Why?

[BARBIE stares Cameron down.]

BARBIE: Do me a favour will you?

CAMERON: *[Incredulous]* I've just sat down!

BARBIE: Next time I'm thinking of buying a house, I'd like to know about it first, hm?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: I haven't a clue what you're on about, as usual.

BARBIE: Don't you get snotty with me young lady! I got a *lovely* little phone call from a woman named Shona. Telling me that I'm interested in buying a house. Kept pushing, pushing, pushing! You can see how I might've been a bit confused by that.

CAMERON: I, er... don't understand it either.

BARBIE: Oh I think you do.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: *[Sighs]* I... meant for it to be a surprise.

BARBIE: Reeceally? Well guess what? You succeeded!

CAMERON: How did she get your number?

BARBIE: Because I cut her hair once.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: Oh...

BARBIE: Mm-hm!

CAMERON: I'm in trouble aren't I?

BARBIE: Yes siree, Bob!

CAMERON: But why didn't you *tell* me you cut Shona Voight's hair?

BARBIE: Because I didn't know she was Shona *Voight* did I you silly girl! I only saw her the one time! You mean to tell me that that long string of frozen piss is the one you've got your tongue hanging out for?

[CAMERON ducks her head. Pause.]

CAMERON: So she, um... doesn't want to meet me for drinks then?

[BARBIE makes an exasperated noise, gets up, and leaves the room. CAMERON sighs heavily.]

SCENE 10

[WILLIAM's dining-room. He is eating but TOBY is in a dream.]

WILLIAM: Toby what's the matter? I specifically asked Mrs Wilkes to make spaghetti bolognaise because I know it's your favourite.

TOBY: I'm not hungry.

WILLIAM: Not hungry? I must make a note of the date! *[Chuckles.]*

[TOBY does an ugly impersonation of his father's smarmy chuckle.]

WILLIAM: But seriously, are you not feeling well? You look a little pale.

TOBY: *[A snappish whine]* I'm fiiiiiiiine-a.

WILLIAM: Don't you think it might be a good idea for you to go and have a lie down?

TOBY: Noooo-wa!

WILLIAM: Okay, alright, well, there's no need to whinge. Would you like some ice-cream?

TOBY: I don't... want... anything.

WILLIAM: *[Sighs]* Is everything okay at school Toby? Or is that an oxymoron? Nobody's annoying you or anything are they?

TOBY: Only you.

WILLIAM: Fair enough. But if there was something, you would tell me wouldn't you?

TOBY: Well...

WILLIAM: You know you can tell your mother and I absolutely anything, right?

TOBY: Even *I* wouldn't be *that* dumb!

[The phone rings. WILLIAM answers it.]

WILLIAM: William Voight speaking?... Ah, hello there Mrs Wilkes, yes, thanks for getting it ready... Mm... Well we'll see you again tomorrow then shall we?... Oh there is?... No no, we've finished eating now, what did you want to talk to me about?... Mm-hm... Right... Too much work, I see... *And* \the cleaning, *and* the... Yep, yep... Oh I know you do your best, of course, you always do a lovely job... Yes, I understand, I appreciate that, absolutely... Well, "The Mrs", as you call her, isn't *going* to be coming back, so... Mm, so you and I might have to come to some other... Yes... Well it's not really conducive over the phone, so maybe... Yes, maybe tomorrow, good idea... Okay, let's do that... Great... Okay then?... Thank you Mrs Wilkes... Good night.

[WILLIAM hangs up.]

TOBY: What's happening tomorrow?

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: *[Meditatively, to TOBY but just as much to himself]* D'you know, maybe that's brought home to me what this is all about.

TOBY: What d'you mean?

WILLIAM: Brought home to me what you and I feel is missing in both of our lives.

TOBY: I don't understand you when you use your... professor voice.

[WILLIAM chuckles. Pause. Suddenly WILLIAM springs to life.]

WILLIAM: I know exactly why you're feeling down in the dumps Toby!

TOBY: You do?

WILLIAM: You don't have to explain anything! You leave it to me, I'll sort it all out, don't you worry, everything will be fine and dandy again!

TOBY: It will?

WILLIAM: You mark my words!

[WILLIAM takes the plates off-stage to the “kitchen.” TOBY gives a long, contemplative sigh and closes his eyes.]

SCENE 11

[WILLIAM’s lounge. WILLIAM has an unlit cigarette in his mouth.]

SHONA: Still smoking I see.

WILLIAM: I haven’t smoked in over six months Shona.

SHONA: That’s why there’s a fag hanging out of your mouth is it?

WILLIAM: It’s. Never. Lit.

SHONA: Fine example you’re setting Toby.

WILLIAM: I never do it in front of him. Nice to see you *too*, by the way.

SHONA: Says he with his back to me. Well? Are you eventually going to tell me why you asked me over?

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Can’t really expect Sally to put you up indefinitely can you?

SHONA: “Put up with me” you mean? No, I am aware of that, thank you very much.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: How are you coping?

SHONA: *[Exaggerated sarcasm]* With great difficulty!

WILLIAM: Is there a special someone?

SHONA: Yes! Me!

[WILLIAM visibly prepares himself for making a rather blunt, rehearsed speech.]

WILLIAM: Shona, could we, um... make another go of it, do you think? For Toby’s sake? For our *own* sakes? *[Pause.]* I mean, I’ve got the house still, you wouldn’t have to come all this way to pick up your silly billboards.

SHONA: *[Ug[y]* What’s silly about them?

WILLIAM: No, nothing, they’re very, um... unique.

SHONA: *[Brightly]* Thank you!

WILLIAM: Then we, er, we wouldn't have to be... alone. Give me another chance Shona, please, we could have a really good stab at it. Well maybe that wasn't the best phrase but, um... you know what I mean.

[Pause.]

SHONA: Willy, I-

WILLIAM: Don't call me that.

SHONA: Sorry. William. I... can't.

WILLIAM: Why not?

SHONA: I just can't.

WILLIAM: *[Dryly]* That makes sense.

SHONA: *[Impatiently]* Oh okay, do you really want to know why-?

WILLIAM: Well yes I do as it happens-

SHONA: I'm seeing Nick.

[Long, horrible pause.]

WILLIAM: My Nick?

SHONA: No. Our Nick.

WILLIAM: *[Laughing]* Okay Shona, very good, you got me that time. But seriously now!

SHONA: Seriously.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: You mean you're really...?

[SHONA nods slowly with a smile, enjoying rubbing it in.]

WILLIAM: You're insane!

SHONA: We're all a little bit insane Willy, some of us just try harder than others to hide it.

WILLIAM: But what the bloody hell could you see in him, he's a joke!

SHONA: Oh is he? Well that'll be a first then, I'll be able to have a *laugh* with someone. Anyway, I thought Nick's supposed to be your friend.

WILLIAM: I thought so too. And now look what he goes and does!

SHONA: Oh thanks very much! Well, as for what I see in him. More than I ever saw in you since I hardly ever used to *see* you at all! Literally or figuratively!

WILLIAM: And exactly how long has this little... liaison been going on?

SHONA: Two months, three days, eight hours and eleven minutes.

WILLIAM: Now wait a minute, I'm not stupid Shona.

SHONA: Aren't you?

WILLIAM: This was probably happening right under my nose all through our marriage wasn't it? Hmm? That's why you left me, come on, admit it.

SHONA: You always put two and two together and get twenty-two don't you Willy?

WILLIAM: Shona, there're always two ways of looking at something.

SHONA: Yeah. The right way and the wrong way. *[Pause.]* Don't flatter yourself Willy, I left you 'cause you're so goddamn boring.

WILLIAM: He's my *publisher* for God's sake!

SHONA: Oh I know, I keep telling him he can do better.

WILLIAM: Think what an awkward position you're putting me in Shona!

SHONA: Oh, oh! "An awkward position." I'm really really sorry about that, Willy! I would've thought you'd be used to those by now!

WILLIAM: And anyway, the guy's still in short trousers! He's twenty-seven and you're thirty six-

SHONA: I realise that, thank you-

WILLIAM: He'd be your toy boy!

SHONA: Oh, too young for me is he? A bit like you and that Cameron girl then.

WILLIAM: Oh for God's sake Shona.

SHONA: I went to get my hair cut by her mother some time ago. Now what exactly was it she said? Hmmm, let me think. Oh yes, that's right. *[Cruel impersonation of BARBIE]* "Cammy really takes the Mickey out of her prof, ooooooh it's such a hoot!"

WILLIAM: You're making that up.

SHONA: *[Shrugs]* Believe whatever you want, Willy.

WILLIAM: *[Hitting back]* Moved in with him yet?

[Pause.]

SHONA: None of your business!

WILLIAM: Aha!

[Pause.]

SHONA: Well... I will shortly!

WILLIAM: Mm-hm. Shortly. Right.

SHONA: You see if I don't!

WILLIAM: You don't have to prove anything to me.

SHONA: No, you're right, I don't. You with your low sperm count, your low friends count, your low wife count. Maybe you don't just don't *count* for *anything*, Little Willy.

[SHONA exits in a fury.]

SCENE 12

[BARBIE is standing behind the counter in her salon. WILLIAM enters and walks over to her.]

BARBIE: Well well well! Hello there Prof! What a lovely surprise!

WILLIAM: Nice to see you Barbie.

BARBIE: Although I did wonder if you might pop in sometime.

WILLIAM: Yes, well...

BARBIE: Come for that free haircut I offered you? It's funny though because I know I would've remembered if you'd booked an appointment. Did one of the other girls do it?

WILLIAM: I... don't have an appointment.

BARBIE: Oh. *[Pause.]* Oh well, that's no problem, I'm sure we can... *[huskily]* squeeze you in.

WILLIAM: The truth is, Barbie, I... I haven't come for a haircut.

BARBIE: I see! What were you after then? A shave? *[Huskily]* A rinse?

WILLIAM: Actually... I came to ask whether I could take you out to dinner sometime?

[Pause.]

BARBIE: Oh Prof, I.... I don't know what to say.

WILLIAM: *[Shrugs]* Say yes.

BARBIE: Wow! I wonder what Cammy would say if I went out with her Prof!

WILLIAM: If we did go out, I think it would be better if nobody knew for the moment, don't you?

BARBIE: I... Yes, that would probably be a wise move.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Well...?

BARBIE: I'd love to, Prof!

WILLIAM: Great, so would I, it would be fun! *[Mutters]* God knows I haven't had a lot of that in a while.

BARBIE: Oh is that right? Well don't worry, I'm a *lot* of... fun!

WILLIAM: I don't doubt it. But then you really must start calling me William.

BARBIE: Ooooh I don't know if I can. It just wouldn't feel right, with you being a prof.

WILLIAM: Don't kid yourself. Academics are the same as everybody else, they know a great deal about certain things and a great deal less about others. *[Mutters]* In fact they are often academic in both senses of the word. *[Smiling]* Go on. Try calling me William. Take the plunge!

BARBIE: *[Sighs]* Okay. *[Deep Breath]* William!

WILLIAM: Hey, there we go! That didn't hurt did it?

BARBIE: How about I take it even further and call you Bill?

WILLIAM: *[Uptight]* Er, I think not! William is just fine.

BARBIE: Okay then. My Midnight Cowboy!

[They laugh.]

SCENE 13

[WILLIAM's lounge.]

WILLIAM: I've asked Mrs Wilkes to come round and baby-sit this evening Toby.

TOBY: [Sighing] Again?

WILLIAM: I thought you liked her.

TOBY: She's alright, but you're always out in the evenings now.

WILLIAM: It's called earning a living Toby.

TOBY: But why the evenings? You've never had to work in the evening before! [Mischievously] Something I should know about?

WILLIAM: [Awkwardly] Don't be ridiculous! I'm having to work twice as hard since your mother took it into her head to piss off. And I can't leave you on your own, so you need a baby-sitter and that's all there is to it.

TOBY: I do not need a baby-sitter! I'm a teenager in three months.

WILLIAM: Oh I do beg your pardon!

TOBY: Couldn't you pay Cameron to look after me?

WILLIAM: Oh you'd love that wouldn't you? I'm not sure she'd even do it for *money*.

TOBY: I'd go to bed nice and early!

WILLIAM: I'll bet you would!

TOBY: Is that a yes then?

WILLIAM: No!

TOBY: You're never even here when I get home from school, so I have to spend every *afternoon* with that Wilkes woman too. And she's always too busy cooking and cleaning to help me with my homework.

WILLIAM: Again, blame your mother. We wouldn't need Mrs Wilkes if it wasn't for her. [Mutters] Why do you think I asked her to come back in the first place?

[Pause.]

TOBY: Couldn't I come along to your work after school instead?

WILLIAM: What, to the university? No you certainly could not!

TOBY: I'd sit in a far corner of the room while you were teaching Cameron and I'd be as quiet as a mouse.

WILLIAM: Aha! Nice try, I'll give you that.

TOBY: Or I could sit in the library. It might encourage me to study more.

WILLIAM: Oh yeah, sure. I know what *you'd* study! I was your age once believe it or not.

[Pause.]

TOBY: Well... maybe Cameron could pop by when I get home from school and... give me extra lessons in, um... English!

WILLIAM: Don't push it Toby.

SCENE 14

[NICK's lounge. He is kissing SHONA's neck.]

NICK: What are you thinking about?

SHONA: You shouldn't ask a woman that all the time.

NICK: Why not?

SHONA: Because one day she might *tell* you.

[NICK sighs and raises his eyebrows. Pause.]

SHONA: It's almost as bad as saying "Don't cry."

[Pause.]

NICK: Well men get a bloody hard time too, you know! If they try to be caring, they're "invasive." And if they leave you to your own thoughts, they're "insensitive."

SHONA: Oh my heart's pumping custard Nick, it really is.

[Pause.]

NICK: *[A nervous afterthought]* You're *not* crying are you?

SHONA: No.

NICK: Whew, 'cause I'm no good at all that emotional stuff. It's just that you don't seem to be giving me warm vibes. And when people don't give me warm vibes I get very confused.

[Pause.]

SHONA: When I told Willy you and I are seeing each other, he looked very smug about the fact that I haven't moved in with you yet.

NICK: *[Awkwardly]* Oh. Really?

SHONA: I assume that's on the cards is it?

NICK: Oh Shona, you don't want to live in this pokey little place do you? Where would you put all your billboard thingies?

SHONA: Oh that's no problem, I'd leave them with Willy like always. A little something for him to remember me by.

NICK: But this is nowhere near where you work.

SHONA: Well I'm all over the place anyway.

NICK: Plus, I never ever thought I'd say this but the publishing industry seems to be in a little bit of a downturn at the moment. It may be, er... hard for me to, um... keep you in the lifestyle to which you've... become accustomed.

SHONA: Just what is that supposed to mean?

[SHONA's cellphone rings. She puts on her singsong saleswoman voice.]

SHONA: Hello, Shona Voight speaking?... Oh hi there, how are things?... Yes... You're kidding?!... Right, great!... Well that's fantastic, that's brilliant, I'll be right down... Thanks... Thank you... Bye.

[SHONA jumps up and down and hugs and kisses NICK, shouting "Yes, yes, yes, yes yes" and pounding the air with her fists.]

NICK: *[Sardonically]* Bad news is it?

SHONA: One massive whack of commission, coming right up!

NICK: *[Thoughtfully]* Well well well...

[We can see from NICK's face that this news changes everything.]

NICK: I think some hefty congratulations are in order! Come on you, *you're* treating *me* tonight! Let's celebrate!

SCENE 15

[WILLIAM's lounge. A loud, repetitive drumbeat can be heard from off-stage. WILLIAM has an unlit cigarette in his mouth.]

WILLIAM: Right Shona, out with it, what're you looking so smug about?

SHONA: I am *indeed* moving in with Nick.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Does *Nick* know that?

SHONA: He suggested it, I'll have you know!

WILLIAM: After the *tiniest* bit of persuasion perhaps?

[SHONA gives WILLIAM a tired look.]

SHONA: Have you told Toby about Nick and I yet? Taken him to one side and brainwashed him?

WILLIAM: If I wanted to brainwash Toby, Shona, I'd have to find it first.

[SHONA laughs in spite of herself.]

WILLIAM: Besides, I wanted to spare him from developing psychological problems for as long as possible.

[SHONA gives WILLIAM a drop-dead look.]

SHONA: Well, I think this is the time we should tell him don't you?

WILLIAM: "We"?

SHONA: Well I'm happy to do it on my own if you'd rather-

WILLIAM: No! No no, let's do it together. If nothing else, that bloody drumbeat's going right through my head!

[WILLIAM goes to the door.]

WILLIAM: *[Shouting]* Toby, your mum's here!

[SHONA joins him at the door.]

SHONA: *[Shouting]* Toby! *[In reference to the cigarette]* Put that bloody thing away, will you!

[WILLIAM conceals the cigarette. TOBY enters.]

SHONA: Hello love! How's school?

TOBY: *[Shrugs]* Hmmmmm.... ‘Sokay.

SHONA: What are you working on?

TOBY: *[Shrugs]* Hmmmmmm.... Nothing much. How’s Auntie Sally?

[WILLIAM chuckles.]

SHONA: Um, well that’s sort of what we wanted to talk to you about. I won’t be staying at Auntie Sally’s anymore.

TOBY: You won’t?

SHONA: No.

TOBY: Why, what did she do?

SHONA: Oh no, it’s nothing *she* did. It’s, um... it’s me.

WILLIAM: It sure is!

[SHONA gives WILLIAM a withering look.]

TOBY: Well... what did *you* do then?

WILLIAM: Sit down here Toby, your mother and I want to tell you something.

TOBY: *[Uncertain]* O...kay, should I be worried about this?

[Simultaneously] SHONA: No! WILLIAM: Yes!

[TOBY sits.]

SHONA: Now Toby. You know your father and I love you more than anything don’t you?

WILLIAM: But we have something to tell you.

TOBY: *[Excitedly]* You’re getting back together?

SHONA: No darling.

WILLIAM: No.

TOBY: *[Disappointed]* Oh.

SHONA: Your father and I just have to move on from one another.

WILLIAM: But we want you to know none of this is your fault. And we’ll always love you no matter what.

TOBY: Sure, how could you *not*? Anyway we've been through all this crap before.

WILLIAM: Hey! Watch your language.

[TOBY gives WILLIAM a look. Pause.]

SHONA: *[Awkwardly]* Toby, I, um... I'm moving in with, er, Uncle Nick. I've been, um... going out with him for a while and, er, the two of us have, um... got close and, er... yeah, I guess that's it.

WILLIAM: So if you feel angry, just let it all out.

[Pause.]

TOBY: Wow that is so cool! He's so awesome and he lives right next to the mall! That's ace, dude! Why didn't you tell me before?

WILLIAM: Nick?! Awesome?!

TOBY: He totally rocks! Isn't it great dad?

[SHONA looks at WILLIAM triumphantly. WILLIAM looks hurt and confused.]

WILLIAM: But I don't understand you Toby! Recently you've been monosyllabic and off your food, and...! I almost didn't recognise you! And now...

TOBY: Oh that wasn't anything to do with *mum*!

WILLIAM: It wasn't? Well what was it then?

TOBY: Duh! I'm wildly and passionately and hopelessly in love! How could I even *think* about anything else?

[WILLIAM and SHONA look at each other.]

SCENE 16

[NICK's lounge. SHONA is sizing up the place. NICK comes in, lugging a suitcase with him.]

NICK: Wow Shona, what the hell have you got in here?

SHONA: Er, that one would be, um... my shoes.

NICK: God, how many pairs have you got?

SHONA: I am a Property Marketing Operative, I cannot be expected to wear the same thing twice in one month!

[NICK carries the cases across the stage and off, then re-enters. SHONA takes a painting out of a box.]

NICK: What's that?

[SHONA shows NICK the painting. NICK nods.]

NICK: *[Pointing]* But there're already paintings up, look!

[SHONA takes the painting off the wall.]

SHONA: Well we can take this grotty one down for a start and hang mine in its place.

NICK: *[Outraged]* I painted that!

SHONA: Oh. Oh, how lovely. Still! A change is as good as a holiday.

[Nick sighs and exits. SHONA hangs up her painting.]

SHONA: *[Satisfied]* There!

[SHONA starts putting ornaments and little knickknacks around the room, and putting NICK's ornaments and knickknacks in the empty boxes. NICK re-enters, lugging several cases at the same time. He stops to get his breath back.]

NICK: *[Puffing]* Where on earth did you find room for all this crap at Sally's?

SHONA: Oh well I didn't *unpack* them all at Sally's.

NICK: Oh.

SHONA: And it is not crap!

[NICK looks at her sceptically, takes the cases off-stage, and once again re-enters. SHONA catches sight of something on the wall.]

SHONA: *[Pointing]* When did you put *that* up?

NICK: It's my "Legend of the Week" Award!

SHONA: *[Dryly]* Your what?

NICK: My "Legend of the Week" Award!

SHONA: E-E... or E-A?

[SHONA goes over to the certificate.]

SHONA: It's a wonder I never spotted it earlier. *[Pause.]* But hang on! You got this at University!

NICK: Sure did! From the Student Union!

SHONA: But that must be *donkeys'* years ago!

NICK: You mean... I'm not "Legend of the Week" anymore?

SHONA: "Legend of the Decade" at this rate! Right next to your degrees too. What're you trying to prove? Isn't it about time you took it down?

NICK: And put it where?

SHONA: Well, put it... oh I don't know... somewhere else!

[SHONA goes to a box and takes out her qualification. She takes down NICK's "Legend of the Week" Award, gingerly places it face-down in the box, and hangs her qualification in its place, next to NICK's degrees.]

NICK: *[Outraged]* But you can't put that there!

SHONA: Why not, you've got your degrees on display for all to see, I'll put mine next to them!

NICK: But...

SHONA: But what?

NICK: Mine are... actual degrees.

SHONA: Oh I see! So that's how it is, is it? And who's making more money at the moment did you say?

[NICK sighs, defeated. He sees the boxes full of his own ornaments and shakes his head.]

SHONA: This is starting to feel much more like home now!

NICK: Whose home? *[Pause. Sighs]* I hope this is gunna work...

SHONA: Of course it will! And look on the bright side! It'll really piss Little Willy off!

[They laugh and start undressing one another, down to their underwear, when the doorbell rings. They look at one another in silent panic. There is banging on the door.]

TOBY: *[Off-stage]* Mum!.... Mum!.... Dad said I could stay the night!

SCENE 17

[WILLIAM's office.]

WILLIAM: Now, I've read your latest scene.

CAMERON: Oh great! And...?

WILLIAM: It's, um... it's... interesting.

CAMERON: "Interesting"?

WILLIAM: It's... getting there. But I have an idea. If we act out this scene together, it might help us assess which lines roll smoothly off the tongue and which ones need revising.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: Well... sure, I mean... I'm happy to *try* it, but... I'll probably look silly.

WILLIAM: Nonsense, it'll be a good exercise for you. Shall we try and do the scene once through without stopping?

CAMERON: O...kay.

WILLIAM: Right. Into position then. Aaaaaaand, from the top!

[CAMERON and WILLIAM now speak their characters' lines until otherwise indicated.]

CAMERON: "Why all the hypocrisy, why can't you just admit that you want me as much as I want you."

WILLIAM: "It's... not that simple."

CAMERON: "Then *make* it simple."

WILLIAM: "You have a husband, I have a wife and child!"

CAMERON: "[*A tedious list*] My husband is a bore, your wife is old and ugly and your child is a burden. Next!"

WILLIAM: "But my wife and I, we... we have a history."

CAMERON: "Precisely. And that's all it is."

WILLIAM: "What?"

CAMERON: [*Simply*] "History."

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: “And what if we were to say those same things about each *other* in years to come?”

CAMERON: “Well, when that time comes we should respect that. Desire is like chewing-gum. Very pleasant until the flavour goes, at which point one should move on.”

WILLIAM: “And what about love?”

CAMERON: “There’s no such thing as love. Only varying degrees of tolerance. *[Pause. Huskily]* So. No strings attached.”

[CAMERON sits on WILLIAM’s knee.]

CAMERON: “I mean, life is all about interacting with everything around you. And when you do that, you become *one* with things, you *merge* with them. And so... whether it’s sex of the body or sex of the spirit... in one way or another, life is all...”

[CAMERON drapes herself around WILLIAM.]

CAMERON: “...about... fucking.”

[WILLIAM lunges towards CAMERON and kisses her passionately. She squirms, then breaks free.]

CAMERON: What’re you *doing*?!

WILLIAM: I’m kissing you, of course.

CAMERON: But...

WILLIAM: It’s what you’ve got written down. “He kisses her passionately.”

CAMERON: Yes but... I didn’t think... you’d actually *do* it!

WILLIAM: Oh come on Cameron, it’s in the scene! You’re not a baby, this isn’t Enid Blyton! Does the scene work or doesn’t it?

CAMERON: But you’re the one who suggested we act out this *particular* scene.

WILLIAM: Because it’s your latest one! For God’s sake Cameron you’re young enough to be my daughter, you want to do another scene we’ll do another scene, that’s fine with me.

[CAMERON exits in a huff. WILLIAM sighs deeply, rubs his eyes, shakes his head, and takes out a cigarette but doesn’t light it.]

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

[NICK's dining-room. TOBY and NICK are sitting at the table while SHONA is serving dinner.]

TOBY: Oh wow, look! This place is full of *our* stuff.

NICK: Yeah, well you've got your mother to thank for that. *[To SHONA]*
This food looks absolutely delicious by the way.

[NICK rises and makes a show of chivalrously pulling out SHONA's chair and making sure she is seated comfortably. When TOBY isn't looking, NICK kisses SHONA's forehead.]

NICK: Delicious food from a delicious cook!

TOBY: Eeeew Uncle Nick, that's gross.

NICK: *[Returning to his seat]* Hey, call me Nick, Soldier!

[NICK does a matey "wink wink, nudge nudge" gesture. SHONA looks at NICK oddly.]

NICK: Your dad would *love* that! How's he doing by the way?

SHONA: Nick, please, not while we're eating.

TOBY: He's good.

SHONA: *[Mutters]* For nothing.

[NICK makes a small gesture to SHONA to stop.]

TOBY: And boy, isn't that Cameron girl hot! Eh Nick?

[SHONA freezes.]

SHONA: *[Icily, to NICK]* You told me you'd never seen her.

NICK: *[Coded]* That's right, I haven't met her yet Toby, you know that!

TOBY: Yes you have, c'mon! You were totally into her at the house!

NICK: Well, who knows, I... I don't remember.

TOBY: How could you possibly forget! Hey! Do you think if I wrote her a letter, you could pass it on to her?

NICK: I wouldn't recognise her if I saw her.

TOBY: And you know what makes her shoot right up off the hotness scale?

NICK & SHONA: What?

TOBY: She's gay!

[Pause.]

SHONA: *[Dawns on her]* Oh my God! So *that's* what all that bullshit with the showhouse was about? Could it be?

NICK: *[Hushed grief]* Dear God what a waste.

SHONA: Oh! Oh, so you *have* seen her then?

NICK: No no, I meant, um... Toby's left half his food.

[SHONA gets up from the table and storms out of the room. Nick hurries after her.]

NICK: *[Exiting]* Shona! Shona wait, it... it's not what you think!

[TOBY watches, confused, then shrugs. He rises and spoons the food from both NICK and SHONA's plates onto his own. Happily, he sits down to eat.]

SCENE 2

[WILLIAM's lounge. A loud, repetitive drumbeat can be heard from off-stage. NICK, SHONA and WILLIAM stand around awkwardly, not knowing what to say to each other. NICK smiles stupidly, but WILLIAM doesn't respond.]

NICK: Toby was an absolute joy to have over, old man! An absolute joy.

WILLIAM: *[Flatly]* I'm glad.

[Pause.]

SHONA: Yes well Nick and I will be off soon. *[Nudges NICK]* Won't we Nick! I'm just going to have a quick wee and then-

WILLIAM: *[Winces]* Whoa, too much information Shona! A simple "I'm just going to the bathroom" would suffice.

[SHONA gives WILLIAM a withering look and exits. Pause.]

NICK: So!...

WILLIAM: *[Flatly]* So.

[The drumbeat ceases.]

NICK: How's the play coming on old man?

WILLIAM: I'm... working on it.

NICK: Aw, come along! Chop chop!

[WILLIAM wrinkles his nose.]

NICK: Your fans are clamouring for more!

WILLIAM: *[Dryly]* Clamouring eh?

NICK: And it is our *duty* to deliver it to them! But remember! "If you fail to prepare, you are preparing to fail"! So put those skinny little shoulders of yours to the wheel and give us the goods pronto!

WILLIAM: Perhaps if I went into publishing and you went into lecturing we'd both get much further.

[NICK looks put out by this but doesn't react. Pause.]

NICK: I do hope there won't be any hard feelings, old man! You know, what with... me, Shona...

WILLIAM: Oh I haven't had hard feelings for Shona in a long time.

[NICK clears his throat awkwardly.]

WILLIAM: You don't know what you're letting yourself in for with her Nick, but what can I say? She always has been a very persuasive saleswoman and you're a grown man now. *[Mutters]* More or less.

[NICK shifts awkwardly and extends his hand, which WILLIAM shakes half-heartedly. SHONA re-enters.]

NICK: Well? Shall we go?

SHONA: No, there's something I want to say to you both.

WILLIAM & NICK: Uh-oh!

SHONA: I learnt some *veeeeeery* interesting information last night. Very interesting *indeed*.

NICK: Trust me Shona, you do *not* want to go there.

SHONA: Oh on the contrary! "There" is *exactly* where I want to go! Well all I can say Willy is this. At least the person I had the hots for didn't turn out to be gay! Not like for you two!

WILLIAM: If you are referring to Cameron, then firstly I do not have the hots for her-

NICK: No, nor do I. *[Heavily coded]* I've never even *met* her! *Have* I old man?

SHONA: *[To WILLIAM]* Oh yeah, sure, pull the other one! *[To NICK]* And Nick, don't dig yourself even deeper.

WILLIAM: And secondly! If you were trying to shock me by revealing that she's a lesbian, I already knew.

SHONA: Good for you, buster! Because you're losing her and Nick to me anyway!

WILLIAM: What exactly is that supposed to mean?

SHONA: Toby was kind enough to reveal the girl's sexual... *[Spits out the word]* proclivities, as you would say Willy! So I guess she pretended to be interested in a showhouse simply to get another glimpse of the... exquisiosity that is Shona!

WILLIAM: *[Can't help himself]* Exquisiteness.

SHONA: *[An ugly shouting down]* Exquisiosity!!

[Pause.]

NICK: Well even if that story's true-

SHONA: What do you mean, "Even if"?

NICK: It shows Cameron must have very good taste!

[WILLIAM groans at NICK. SHONA gives NICK an oh so tolerant look and shake of the head.]

WILLIAM: *[To SHONA]* What was that crap you were spouting about a showhouse? Why would Cameron want to see *you*?!

SHONA: See for yourself.

[SHONA hunts around in her handbag, and shoves a piece of paper at WILLIAM.]

WILLIAM: This is her handwriting!

SHONA: No shit Sherlock. Why don't you keep it as a souvenir? Tear it down the middle and have half each!

[SHONA exits on a high note. NICK smiles stupidly again, shuffles about, and then goes out after her.]

SCENE 3

[WILLIAM's office.]

WILLIAM: Let's... have a look at your draft shall we?

CAMERON: I've been working so hard on it and I must say I'm actually feeling really confident!

WILLIAM: *[Dryly]* That's wonderful.

[WILLIAM hands it to her. After looking at it for a few seconds, CAMERON completely deflates.]

CAMERON: But... why?

WILLIAM: What's the matter?

CAMERON: A 'B'?! You're giving me a 'B'?!

WILLIAM: That's not a bad mark for a draft. You should be fairly happy with that.

CAMERON: But you don't understand. If I only end up getting a 'B' they might even take away my scholarship. Or at any rate, I certainly won't stand a chance of getting one for my PhD! And I need every scholarship I can get, we need the money!

WILLIAM: All the more reason to make sure you get an 'A' then. Cameron, I understand why you're frustrated, believe me. I've been in this business a long time. I know from personal experience what it's like to have a play cut to pieces! To have your favourite bits ruthlessly murdered! But I also know what works in theatre and what doesn't. Everything I suggest is in order to help you.

CAMERON: *[A whine]* But I've *done* everything you've suggested! Everything!

WILLIAM: Ooooh, you shouldn't do that though Cameron, you should use your discretion. You might not end up getting full marks for "Creativity and Originality" if you do absolutely *everything* I suggest.

CAMERON: So what am I supposed to *do* then?

WILLIAM: Give the best possible expression to your own unique authorial voice.

CAMERON: How can I? It hardly even feels like my own play anymore.

WILLIAM: That's nonsense, it will always be your play. Always. Your overall structure just needs work, that's all.

CAMERON: *[A whine]* But in what way?

WILLIAM: Well that's ultimately up to you. You've just said you want it to be your play, haven't you?

CAMERON: Well yes, but...

[WILLIAM puts his arm round CAMERON's shoulder and squeezes her.]

WILLIAM: Now don't get disheartened!

[CAMERON pulls away.]

CAMERON: Do you think, er...?

WILLIAM: What?

CAMERON: Do you think I could, um...?

WILLIAM: What Cameron?

CAMERON: Would there be any way I could... get a... second professional opinion?

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: *[Dryly]* Someone to tell you what you want to hear?

CAMERON: *[Flustered]* No, I... I just wouldn't mind confirmation of your views from someone else.

WILLIAM: *[Feigned sadness]* In other words you don't trust me. Well, what can I say? I'm sorry you feel that way.

CAMERON: Of course I trust you, but...

WILLIAM: But what?

CAMERON: But nothing. *[Pause.]* You're right, I'm sorry, forget I said anything.

WILLIAM: No, if it would make you feel more at ease I can have someone else check it.

CAMERON: No no, it's... okay. I'm sorry.

WILLIAM: Don't be. If in doubt, it's essential to question the status quo.

CAMERON: I'll go and work on it some more.

WILLIAM: That would be wise.

[CAMERON exits, closing the door behind her. WILLIAM chuckles roguishly to himself and takes out a cigarette but doesn't light it.]

SCENE 4

[BARBIE's dining-room. CAMERON can hardly speak because she is on the verge of tears.]

BARBIE: Aha! Not so confident now are you?

CAMERON: Oh... put a sock in it.

BARBIE: Don't you talk to me like that!

CAMERON: Can't you ever just... be quiet?

[Long pause.]

BARBIE: Oh Cameron why won't you let me read your play?

CAMERON: Because! Whenever I show you my stuff you say, "But that just wouldn't *happen!*" Or, "But people just don't *talk* like that!" And when I ask you how you'd change it, you say, "Oh I don't know, I'm no author!"

BARBIE: Yeah. So?

CAMERON: So there's your answer. And anyway it's not just you who doesn't get to see it, it's everyone except him. Not that he deserves to, mind you.

BARBIE: Oh, now you're just being stupid.

CAMERON: No, I'm being honest.

[Pause.]

BARBIE: Well he's who you've got!

CAMERON: Maybe that's the problem.

BARBIE: Don't be a smart-arse Cameron.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: He's such a fucking phoney though, you know? He says to me, "Have a look at such-and-such a play, and analyse how the playwright manages to achieve this this this and this." Then we'd start discussing it and he'd say, "Well, it's been a while since I've read it." *[Pause.]* Oh, I dunno. I just would've liked someone a little bit more... with it. You know? I mean, he hasn't exactly "made it big" internationally.

BARBIE: Bigger than you.

CAMERON: Thanks for that. D'you know, I could never be bothered to finish reading a single one of his plays.

[BARBIE gives CAMERON a look.]

BARBIE: I hope you told him they were masterpieces though!

CAMERON: Something like that. Living with Barbie “Ulterior Motive” Hollis for twenty-two years has rubbed off on me.

BARBIE: Good! Well, maybe you *should* try finishing his plays. He didn’t get to be a prof by magic.

CAMERON: Yeah well I’m... beginning to wonder about that.

[Pause. CAMERON cracks, and the tears flow.]

CAMERON: It’s just... You... put your heart... and soul into something and you... think you’ve nailed it, and then someone comes along... and says... *[pompous impersonation]* “Your structure needs work.” What does that *mean*?! What does it *mean*?!

BARBIE: That’s why you must go and talk to him about it. You *have* to! You must sit there and make him explain it to you over and over again until you understand it. Otherwise you can’t fix it.

CAMERON: But don’t you see? It’s not... some standard thing you can just... “explain.” It all depends on the... on the... material. And if he were to tell me how to... structure it, he’d be... doing all the work *for* me!
[Pause.] Do you know... what the worst thing of all is?

BARBIE: What?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: I don’t... even... *like* my play anymore.

SCENE 5

[NICK’s lounge. The phone rings and SHONA answers it.]

SHONA: Hello?... Sure, who shall I say is calling... Excuse me?!... Personal, what do you mean it’s *personal*?!

[SHONA hangs up.]

SHONA: Bloody cheek.

[NICK enters.]

NICK: Who was that?

SHONA: Wrong number.

NICK: *[Dryly]* Then why was it a bloody cheek?

[The phone rings again. SHONA dives towards it but NICK picks it up casually before she can stop him.]

NICK: *[To SHONA, irritably]* What?

[NICK speaks into the phone.]

NICK: Nick Slade speaking?... Victoria!

[At this, SHONA jumps up and down and starts making firm, hostile gestures. She does this throughout.]

SHONA: *[Hisses]* What?! The ex-factor?! What the hell does *she* want?

NICK: ...Well what an unexpected pleasure!

SHONA: *[Hisses]* Pleasure, my arse!

NICK: ...Life's treating you fine and dandy I hope?

SHONA: *[Scoffs]* "It's personal"!

NICK: *[Hisses to Shona]* Will you shut up! *[Back into phone]* Oh nothing, just the TV!

SHONA: *[Yells]* No it bloody well is not!

NICK: ...Hmm? Oh my God!... Oh Victoria, what terrible news I'm, I'm so sorry...

SHONA: *[Hisses]* Hang on, hang on, what's she saying now? What does she want?

[SHONA moves towards NICK but he pushes her away.]

NICK: He was such a lovely man. You took after him.

SHONA: *[Hisses]* Who, who?

NICK: When was this?... Mm-hm... And peacefully I hope?... Oh well that's a mercy at least... So that's why you're in town?... Well thank you for thinking of me, of course I'll come, when is it?... Right, and whereabouts?... Well thanks, that means a lot, I'll be there.

SHONA: *[Hisses]* What, what means a lot? Oh just give me that! Give me that phone!

[SHONA wrestles with NICK for the phone.]

NICK: *[Struggling]* ...Sorry Victoria, can you hang on for just a sec? *[To SHONA]* What the hell's your problem, what are you, twelve? *[Into phone]* Sorry about that... Well I suppose one shouldn't really be thinking like this at this point in time, but at least your financial future is secure now... Mm... I know... I know... Is there anything I can do for you in the meantime?

SHONA: *[Hissed]* Oh yes, you'd love to do things for her, wouldn't you?

NICK: Okay, well if there is you just let me know, okay?... Okay... Take it easy. And take care of yourself... Okay... Bye-bye now.

[NICK hangs up.]

SHONA: *[Cruel impersonation]* "Bye-bye now!" *[Normal again.]* What's your ex-girlfriend doing popping out of the woodwork now, I thought you said it was over between you!

NICK: It is, but we can still be friends can't we?

SHONA: Cringingly so!

NICK: Oh for God's sake Shona, her dad's just died, she's down here for the funeral.

SHONA: Amazing the lengths some people go to isn't it?

NICK: Both her parents were like family to me.

SHONA: I'll bet. *[Another cruel impersonation]* "At least this means your financial future is secure now."

NICK: Well it's true!

SHONA: Oh that is so... typical!

NICK: You can really be quite cruel.

SHONA: I sure can honey, I sure can! I can see I'm going to have to watch you like a hawk.

NICK: *[With a curiously new authority]* The funeral is on Wednesday and I will be going!

[Pause.]

SHONA: And if *[mock "cut-glass" accent]* "Victoria" had just wanted to get together to talk about old times? *[Sarcastically]* "Reminisce." Would you still have met up with her?

NICK: That is not why she phoned.

SHONA: Hypothetically I mean, if it was?

NICK: What's the point of asking that?

SHONA: *[Sickly sweet]* Oh because I'm just so *genuinely interested*.

NICK: *[Sighs]* Then no. I wouldn't want to sit and discuss old times with Victoria. I've got *you* now!

SCENE 6

[BARBIE and CAMERON's house. They are eating a takeaway pizza for dinner.]

CAMERON: Look mum, I've been thinking about something-

BARBIE: I'll not tell you again. Don't use the m-word. Call me Barbie.

CAMERON: Oh come on, I can't call you that, it's absolutely ridiculous!

BARBIE: Oh Cammy, where's your sense of style?

CAMERON: Will you please just listen for once in your life! We need to talk.

BARBIE: Oh, here we go.

CAMERON: I think it's about time I moved out.

[BARBIE is just about to put a piece of pizza into her mouth when she stops dead. It stays comically suspended in mid-air throughout the next section.]

BARBIE: What?

CAMERON: You heard.

BARBIE: Out of where?

CAMERON: Here.

BARBIE: Here? For how long?

CAMERON: Well, um... permanently.

BARBIE: But where did this come from all of a sudden?

CAMERON: It didn't come from *anywhere* "all of a sudden", I've been thinking about it for ages.

BARBIE: But who would look after you, who would make sure you had enough to eat, who would *protect* you?

CAMERON: No-one! That's the beauty of it!

BARBIE: Oh I see. And where were you planning to stay?

CAMERON: I... hadn't really thought that far yet.

BARBIE: Anywhere as long as it's away from here, is that it?

CAMERON: Well...

BARBIE: And more to the point, what're you going to use for money?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: I'll carry on with the waitressing....

BARBIE: Aw, get off the grass! That wouldn't pay for bugger-all.

[BARBIE takes it up a gear.]

BARBIE: I am your family Cameron, whether you like it or not. And you should respect your family because family are the people who bring you up!

CAMERON: *[Mutters]* Family are the people who bring you *down*.

BARBIE: I heard that! *[Scoffs dismissively]* Sounds like something straight out of Corrie!

CAMERON: *[Superior]* I wouldn't know.

[Pause.]

BARBIE: I work my fingers to the bone every hour of every day, putting up with other people's shit in order to put food on the table, and this is the thanks I get?

CAMERON: Please don't take it like that-

BARBIE: Oh I'm so sorry, how would you like me to take it? *[Pause as something dawns on her.]* Now wait a minute. I'm not as dim as I look, I know what this is about!

CAMERON: Enlighten me.

BARBIE: You've got some girl smuggled away somewhere haven't you? First that Shona bird rejected you and now you've found some tart your own age who's a bad influence on you!

CAMERON: Unfortunately I haven't, that's one of the main reasons I want to move out!

BARBIE: This is all your father's fault.

CAMERON: Oh why do you always bring *him* into everything?

BARBIE: It is because of Brian that you never had a solid male role model in your life! If he hadn't left you'd never have turned into a... a...

CAMERON: Lesbian?

BARBIE: I knew I shouldn't have breast-fed you for so long!

[CAMERON doesn't know what to say to this.]

BARBIE: And if what you say is true and you've never had a girlfriend, how do you even know you're gay?

CAMERON: Well you've never been with a woman either, so how do you know that you're *straight*?

[For several moments, BARBIE looks visibly disturbed as she follows this logic through, then she recovers.]

BARBIE: Don't play mind games with me young lady! I keep telling you, us girlies must always make the most of what we've got. You should do something different with your hair occasionally.

CAMERON: *[Clenched teeth]* My. Hair. Is. Fine.

BARBIE: I mean, look at mine!

CAMERON: Yes, look at it.

BARBIE: You could have any man you want if only you'd put in a bit more effort. You just haven't found the right one yet, that's all.

CAMERON: Um, I hate to repeat myself but... neither have you.

BARBIE: *[Hurt, but makes a triumphant retort]* No, so like I said, it's all Brian's fault. In fact! Maybe! It runs in the family! He walked out on me to chase after young girls too! Remember? Well go then, go! Leave me all alone! What do I care?

[BARBIE drops her head onto the table and shakes with big loud sobs. At first, CAMERON isn't taken in, but as it gets more intense she begins to approach BARBIE slowly and guiltily.]

CAMERON: Oh mum-

BARBIE: Barbie!

CAMERON: Barbie. I'm sorry, you're... you're right, it was selfish of me, I didn't really mean any of it-

BARBIE: Liar.

CAMERON: You're a fabulous mother, why would I want to live anywhere else?
[Pause.] Well, um, you know where to find me.

[CAMERON leaves the room as BARBIE continues to sob with great gusto. As soon as CAMERON has gone, BARBIE instantly drops the act, sits up bright and chirpy, and takes a big last chomp of pizza.]

SCENE 7

[WILLIAM's lounge.]

NICK: So, tell me! Is a new smash-hit finally in the making?

WILLIAM: Well I certainly wouldn't mind doing some smashing and hitting of my own.

NICK: Ooooooh, that's not in reference to me I hope, I'm a lover not a fighter. Well, crack on old man! I can already see my share of your royalty cheques flashing before my eyes! I want to see some results with a capital R!

[NICK starts exiting, but remembers something.]

NICK: Oh, by the way....

[NICK reaches into his briefcase.]

NICK: Could you give these to Toby for me?

WILLIAM: What are they?

NICK: A cellphone and... an ipod.

[Long, horrible pause.]

WILLIAM: Right! Right! That does it, that is the last straw! Why... are you doing this?

NICK: Doing what, old man?

WILLIAM: Don't call me "old man"! You little twerp! It's not enough you had to steal my wife, now you're buying my son off as well!!

NICK: Hey, now just cool it mate-

WILLIAM: Mate?!

NICK: "Look before you leap." I'm not buying off your son, I'm giving him my leftovers! I upgrade all the time, what else am I going to do with

them? *[Brightly]* And as for Shona, don't take this the wrong way old man, but it really has fuck-all to do with you now.

WILLIAM: It has *everything* to do with me where my son is concerned!

NICK: Well your son seems perfectly happy to me. In fact, I probably *make* him happy.

WILLIAM: *[Lunging at NICK]* How dare you?!

[NICK dodges nimbly and starts exiting]

NICK: Uh-uh. Don't do anything rash, old man. I'll... see myself out shall I?

[As NICK exits, WILLIAM throws the cellphone and ipod at him.]

WILLIAM: *[Shouting mockingly]* "Look before you leap, creep!"

SCENE 8

[NICK's lounge. SHONA flops down on the couch and kicks off her shoes.]

NICK: How was your day?

SHONA: You can see how my day was.

[NICK puts on a Frank Sinatra CD.]

SHONA: Why are you putting on *that* boring old fart?

NICK: It's Frankie, it'll relax you.

SHONA: I don't want some old dead guy curing my insomnia! I had enough of that with Little Willy! Let's have something decent. Preferably silence.

[NICK gets up again.]

NICK: Your wish is my command.

SHONA: Since when?

[NICK gives SHONA a look, turns off the CD, then starts massaging her feet.]

NICK: Well your day can't have been as bad as mine. Your husband accused me of trying to buy Toby off.

SHONA: Prick.

NICK: Yeah! Almost throttled me!

SHONA: Really? What happened?

NICK: I dodged. I remained my cool, calm, collected self.

SHONA: Ah, you see, that's where you and I are so different. I would've let him show me what he's made of. But we already know that don't we?
[Pause.] Ah, people sometimes...

NICK: People aren't so bad.

SHONA: Oh that's easy for you to say, I'm not like you, I'm not naturally.... well I'm not naturally... *nice*.

[NICK laughs.]

SHONA: *[Sighs]* Oh, just ignore me, I'm dealing with people who've got more money than brains and I have to try and get them to *part* with that money. Decide whether they want five bathrooms and six bedrooms or five bedrooms and six bathrooms. Mind you, at least they don't waste my time like that Cameron girl. All the same, whoever said a fool and his money are soon parted was talking shit.

[Pause. NICK stops massaging and looks uneasy.]

NICK: While we're on the subject of business, I almost forgot, I'm going to be home late tomorrow evening.

SHONA: Why?

NICK: I have, um... things to sort out.

SHONA: What sort of things?

NICK: Oh... things.

SHONA: You're not... meeting Victoria again are you?

[Having been caught out lying by SHONA once before, NICK hesitates slightly too long in answering this.]

NICK: *[Too bright]* No, of course not!

SHONA: *[Slyly]* Why of course not?

NICK: Look Shona. You and I are business people. I don't ask *you* when and why *you'll* be late. And do you know why? Because I have faith in people's integrity. I put my trust in them.

SHONA: Yeah, well there's your problem. *[Pause.]* You *are* meeting Victoria *aren't* you?

NICK: Look. Even if I was, which I'm not, what difference does it make?

SHONA: It makes a huge difference! I think the time has come for us to take our relationship to the next level.

[Pause.]

NICK: [Suddenly fired up] Ah, I see, you're talking about, like... group sex! Well sure, what guy's going to say no to that?

SHONA: No I am *not* talking about group sex!

NICK: [Disappointed] Oh. [Brightly] Why ever not?

SHONA: I am talking about marriage Nick!

[Pause.]

NICK: M-marriage? But you're married already.

SHONA: I know that, dumbo, I meant to you.

NICK: B-but you're not divorced yet.

SHONA: Oh yes, I forgot that, thanks for reminding me.

NICK: Well what's the hurry, you've already had *one* miserable one.

SHONA: I'm not getting any younger Nick, as Little Willy continually delights in insinuating.

NICK: Well you look younger and younger every day.

SHONA: [Harshly] Oh, cut it out, you're all talk, can't you ever just be... human?

[Pause.]

NICK: I let you move *in* here Shona, what more do you want?

SHONA: Oh you let me did you? How big of you!

NICK: Let's not forget, *I* didn't come chasing after *you*! You were quite happy about us having a little fling while you were still living with William, and now all of a sudden you want permanence?! [Pause.] They don't call marriage an "institution" for nothing, as you should know! Why have a double-storey when you can have a semi-detached?

SHONA: Why buy the *cow* when you can get the milk for free you mean?!

NICK: I didn't say that at all. Look Shona, I have absolutely no intention of getting married for a.... *veeeeeeeery* long time. If at all! I don't mind us

living together for as long as it's convenient, but if that's not ideal for you, then... I'm sorry about that.

[Pause.]

SHONA: Well I'm sorry about that too Nick! Seems like I jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. You know, it severely pains me to say this but Willy was actually right about something. You *are* a joke!

[SHONA storms out, but we can see from NICK's puzzled expression that her last comments are all he can think about. Once he has recovered, he picks up the phone and dials.]

NICK: Hello?... Victoria?... Hi, it's Nick here... I'm doing okay, and you, how are you coping?... I'm glad!... We're still on for tomorrow evening I hope?... Oh good... Look Victoria, there's something I've been wanting to say to you and if I don't say it now I'll never have the courage... You see, the truth is, I haven't been able to think about anyone but you since we broke up... No, I mean it!... I've been sitting alone feeling miserable, with only a bottle of wine for company... You don't have to say *anything*... Sorry, who was who?... The woman who answered my phone you mean?... Oh, my, um, aunt... No, I try *not* to mention her. Bitter old cow... Yes, very, um, clingy. But she's out of my hair now, thank God... Okay well, now that I've made a fool of myself shall we save the rest for tomorrow... Great!... I feel better too! Okay Vicky... Right... Bye.

[NICK grins from ear to ear.]

SCENE 9

[WILLIAM's lounge. He and SHONA are sitting having a drink.]

WILLIAM: I didn't think you'd condescend to grace me with your presence here anymore now that you've got Nick the Prick!

SHONA: Well that's what I wanted to talk to you about.

WILLIAM: A-ha! Novelty's wearing off is it?

SHONA: I've been thinking long and hard about what you said. About... starting over.

WILLIAM: You have?

SHONA: Well the reality is he's committed to everything except me.

WILLIAM: Well, he committed to being a toy boy... he probably committed adultery... two out of three's not bad.

[SHONA gives WILLIAM a withering look.]

SHONA: I mean, I bought him a car, I've been paying the rent, but...

WILLIAM: Wait, wait, you bought Nick a *car*?

SHONA: Not just any car either, a-

WILLIAM: And you paid his *rent*?

SHONA: What are you, a parrot?

WILLIAM: But how on earth could you afford all that suddenly?

SHONA: *[Winks]* Women can be good at their jobs too you know. So I wondered whether, rather than me going back to Sally's, we could do what you suggested and I'd move back in for old time's sake. Give Toby a stable family life again.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Oh Shona, I'm so glad you think that. I've been dying for you to say that for such a long time.

SHONA: You mean that?

WILLIAM: Absolutely!

SHONA: Well, great, um... shall I bring my things over soon then?

WILLIAM: *[Shrugs]* You can do whatever you like Shona. Little Willy's found someone else now.

[Long, horrible pause.]

SHONA: Who?

WILLIAM: *[Laughs]* None of your business.

SHONA: *[Furious]* Everything... is my business!

WILLIAM: Well, what can I say? I'm afraid you're just going to have to let me go.

SHONA: You're making it up, I don't believe you for one single second!

WILLIAM: What, you think no-one else would have me, is that it?

SHONA: *[Hammy]* Well... um...

WILLIAM: You're wrong. *[Proclamation]* I am currently in a relationship with Cameron's mother. Barbie. There. You wanted to know.

[Long pause.]

SHONA: You know, you'd look far less stupid just *not* lying at all than coming up with shit like that.

WILLIAM: I'm *not* lying!

[SHONA scrutinises WILLIAM's expression.]

SHONA: Oh... my... God! You're serious aren't you?

WILLIAM: Er, that is what is generally implied by the phrase "I'm not lying."
[Pause.] William Voight is officially the Midnight Cowboy at last!

SHONA: Can't have the daughter, so go after the mother eh?

WILLIAM: Don't be ridiculous!

SHONA: I always knew you were mad but at least you used to like them with a bit of class. I know what this is about, this is just because you couldn't have *me* when you *begged* me to come back!

WILLIAM: Don't flatter yourself Shona. And anyway, I did not beg. I merely made a proposition.

SHONA: Oh! "Merely made a proposition." Isn't he a gentleman!

WILLIAM: And anyway, why should it matter to you who I go out now?

SHONA: You really think it matters to me do you? Hm? I'm only worried about who Toby's wicked stepmother might be! I *instigated* the trial separation, thank you very much!

WILLIAM: Precisely. So why don't you just admit that the reason you've come crawling back here is because *you're* the one still pining after *me*!

SHONA: There's only one context in which I associate you with the word "pine" and I can promise you this isn't it.

WILLIAM: You see? You see? That is exactly why I'm going out with Barbie. She's fun, she's spunky, she's good-natured, and most importantly she... appreciates me.

SHONA: I'll bet she does. You probably spend most of your time correcting her grammar, am I right? [Pompous impersonation of WILLIAM] "No no Barbie, don't say, 'I'll give you a blowjob, Prof.' Say, 'I'll *perform fellatio*.'" It's pathetic. Absolutely pathetic!

WILLIAM: Alright Shona, keep your hair on. [Mutters] What's left of it.

[SHONA turns her back on WILLIAM and exits.]

SCENE 10

[WILLIAM's dining-room.]

TOBY: Dad?

WILLIAM: What?

TOBY: Nick says he gave you his old cellphone and ipod to give to me!
Where are they?

WILLIAM: Well, he's talking rubbish. *[Pause.]* So it's "Nick" now is it? Very chummy.

TOBY: Yeah, he says "Uncle Nick" makes him sound too old.

WILLIAM: Well whatever he's called I don't want to hear his name mentioned ever again! And nor does your mother by the sound of it.

TOBY: What d'you mean?

WILLIAM: I'll tell you later.

TOBY: *[Sighing irritably]* You always say that!

WILLIAM: Now don't forget, today Mrs Wilkes is-

TOBY: Oh, fuck Mrs Wilkes!

[Brief, shocked pause from WILLIAM.]

WILLIAM: What did you say?!

TOBY: Oh and by the way, that's *another* thing Nick never says.

WILLIAM: What?

TOBY: *[Pompous impersonation of his father]* "Watch your language."

WILLIAM: No, I'll bet he doesn't. You've probably picked *up* words like that from him haven't you?

TOBY: Nick says when you swear you should swear like a man!

WILLIAM: *[Rising and pointing angrily]* I couldn't give a *fuck* what Nick...
[realises his mistake and trails off]... says.

[The phone rings. WILLIAM answers it, and makes cringing gestures throughout.]

WILLIAM: William Voight speaking?... Oh, good afternoon Vice Chancellor...
How can I help you sir?... Um, the play?... Well it still isn't quite finished, but hopefully it shouldn't be too much longer... Oh, the

overview... Oh I'm sorry to hear that sir, may I ask in what respect?... Oh dear!... Well I can promise you sir, it's shaping up into a far stronger piece as a play than it was in summarised form... A deadline?!... When for?... But that's only...! Um, with respect sir, what do you mean "Action will be taken"?... Well yes actually, I *would* like you to spell it out... You mean I'd lose my job?!... Yes sir, perfectly, absolutely crystal... Thank you sir, same to you... Okay... Right... Bye...

[WILLIAM hangs up. Then he picks up the phone and throws it against the wall. There is a silence. TOBY is too stunned to speak.]

WILLIAM: Son of a bitch!

TOBY: What was that about dad?

WILLIAM: Wants a completed draft of my new play in two weeks' time or I'm out on my arse.

TOBY: What new play?

WILLIAM: Fucking good question!

[Pause.]

TOBY: *[Tauntingly enjoying it]* You're in trouble aren't you?

WILLIAM: *You'll* be in trouble if you don't watch out. Go and do your homework.

TOBY: I've done it.

WILLIAM: Do it again.

TOBY: I'll do some more drum practice.

WILLIAM: No, shut up with the bloody drums already, getting on my Goddamn nerves, can't hear myself speak.

TOBY: You're lucky then. Why're you being so mean, I haven't *done* anything!

WILLIAM: No, that's true, you've *never* done anything. Ever!

[TOBY starts to cry.]

WILLIAM: Maybe if you'd pull your finger out once in a while you might actually manage to accomplish something useful. Now go to your room and don't come out until I tell you! Preferably not even then.

TOBY: You're horrible.

WILLIAM: Oh stop whinging, you're such a baby, you need to toughen up. Could lose some weight for a start, wear some decent clothes.

TOBY: I hate you!

WILLIAM: Oh yeah? Well I hate you right back, you fucking spoilt little brat!

[TOBY runs out, sobbing. A wave of shame and remorse washes over WILLIAM. He starts running after TOBY.]

WILLIAM: *[Shouts desperately]* Toby! Toby I... I didn't mean it, I'm sorry! Toby!

[WILLIAM takes the cigarette out again.]

SCENE 11

[WILLIAM is working in his office. He has an unlit cigarette in his mouth. There is a knock at the door. He conceals the cigarette.]

WILLIAM: *[Gloomily theatrical]* Enter.

[CAMERON enters.]

CAMERON: Hi!

WILLIAM: Hello Cameron. Come on in.

CAMERON: I got your email.

WILLIAM: I gathered.

CAMERON: What did you want to see me about?

WILLIAM: I have a request. When we have our next meeting, I'd like you to bring along your original drafts of every scene you've written so far.

CAMERON: What do you mean?

WILLIAM: I mean, each of the scenes as they were when you first sent them to me, before I critiqued them. Remember I gave them back to you? Would you do that for me?

[Pause.]

CAMERON: Well... sure, but... why?

WILLIAM: Because... when you hand in your final draft, I need to be able to judge one against the other.

CAMERON: But... the final draft's not due for another whole month.

WILLIAM: I know but, um... I've got a lot on my plate and I need to make sure I have enough time to read everything properly. So let's plan to meet as soon as we can, shall we?

CAMERON: *[Uncertain]* Um... o...kay, well... fine, I'll um... bring them next time then.

WILLIAM: *[Brusque]* That would be good.

[Awkward pause.]

CAMERON: Great, well... see ya.

WILLIAM: Take care.

[Somewhat disturbed, CAMERON exits and closes the door behind her. WILLIAM sighs and takes the unlit cigarette out again.]

SCENE 12

[BARBIE's lounge. CAMERON enters.]

CAMERON: *[Shouts]* Mum?... Mum, it's me! *[Long pause. Shouts]* Mum?!...

[BARBIE enters in a bathrobe, dripping wet.]

BARBIE: Cameron... W-what are you doing here?

CAMERON: Um... for some reason I haven't quite worked out yet, I still live here.

[Awkward pause.]

BARBIE: I meant... what are you doing back so early?

CAMERON: Jodie felt ill so we all went home.

WILLIAM: *[Shouts, off-stage]* Barbie, is everything okay?

[WILLIAM enters, haphazardly dressed. Long, horrible pause.]

WILLIAM: It's... not what it looks like!

CAMERON: The fuck it's not. So this is why you always ask me if I wouldn't rather spend the evenings with my friends than stay "cooped up at home!"

WILLIAM: Your mother was upset, so I came around to... to...

CAMERON: Cheer her up? Why does everyone underestimate me? *[To WILLIAM]* Couldn't decide which one of us you wanted, is that it? *[To BARBIE]* First he slobbers all over me and now this!

BARBIE: What're you talking about, what do you mean "slobbers all over you?"

CAMERON: Well we were acting out a scene from my play, and-

BARBIE: Acting?! Oh is that all! Whew! God Cammy, you gave me such a fright!

[Pause. CAMERON looks from one to the other hopelessly.]

CAMERON: Well that settles it. Now I really *must* get a new supervisor.

WILLIAM: *[Frantically cajoling]* Oh, come on! This is between your mother and I, it has nothing to do with what happens at university.

CAMERON: How can you say that?

WILLIAM: Plus it's late in the year and I already know your work so well.

BARBIE: Cammy, please.

CAMERON: How am I supposed to face him sitting across the desk from me now mum? Hm? What am I going to say to him? "Hello dad!"

BARBIE: Oh don't be ridiculous.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: *[Deflated]* I'd better go I think.

BARBIE: *[Gloomily]* I guess so. I'll speak to you tomorrow.

WILLIAM: Please, don't be too hasty Cameron. Before you do anything, come and talk to me and we'll um... yeah.

[Pause. WILLIAM exits, awkwardly.]

BARBIE: Oh, now look what you've done.

CAMERON: What *I've* done?!

BARBIE: I do not need your permission Cameron.

CAMERON: He is my supervisor, what the fuck are you doing?!

BARBIE: The man is a professional.

CAMERON: Yeah, a professional prick!

BARBIE: Don't say that.

CAMERON: Oh come on mum-

BARBIE: Barbie.

[CAMERON gives BARBIE a look. BARBIE gets upset.]

BARBIE: The first time in ages I'm in a healthy relationship-

CAMERON: Healthy?! Oh spare me the sob story!

BARBIE: And you have to go and spoil it for me.

CAMERON: Okay, okay. You know what? Fine! I'll change supervisors first thing tomorrow, and you can keep seeing him without it being quite as... sick.

BARBIE: Oh come on Cammy, you've only got another month-

CAMERON: I don't care.

BARBIE: And if you ask to change supervisors, people will want to know why, and he'll probably lose his job! With all the pressure he's already under. That's really what you want is it? Hm?

[Pause. CAMERON relents.]

CAMERON: How do you always manage to do it?

BARBIE: Do what?

CAMERON: Make me feel guilty.

BARBIE: One of my many talents.

SCENE 13

[WILLIAM is sitting working in his office, with the door open. There is an unlit cigarette in his mouth. When he hears CAMERON approaching, he conceals the cigarette. CAMERON enters timidly, carrying a thick box-file. Awkward pause.]

WILLIAM: Hello.

CAMERON: *[Stilted]* Hello.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: Look, about last night. I'm really-

CAMERON: Please, let's not go there. I've been thinking. And I've decided not to get a new supervisor. We'll just go on as before. As though nothing has happened.

[Pause.]

WILLIAM: I think that's a sensible decision Cameron.

[Pause.]

CAMERON: So! I've brought all my original scene drafts for *The Chrysanthemum Man*. And they're in the right order.

WILLIAM: *[Fishing]* Great! And you've... *still* never shown the play to anyone but me?

CAMERON: Nope, no-one, why?

WILLIAM: No, I'm... I'm just... I feel... privileged! *[Pause.]* That's great, thank you, just pop them on my desk there.

[CAMERON does so. WILLIAM smiles. Pause.]

WILLIAM: Well... Where're you heading for the rest of the day?

CAMERON: Um, I don't know really.

WILLIAM: Come, I'll walk with you.

[WILLIAM puts the box-file in his briefcase, picks it up, and rises. Then they exit WILLIAM's office, he takes a key out of his pocket, and locks the door behind him. They walk down the corridor.]

WILLIAM: *[As they reach the lift shaft]* Hey, look at that!

CAMERON: *[Stopping]* What?

[WILLIAM forcefully pushes CAMERON backwards down the lift shaft. She has no time to scream. Very long pause as WILLIAM stares down, then looks away. He takes out a cigarette and actually lights it for the first time in the play, with trembling fingers. He takes a few paces, and looks back over his shoulder in terror in case CAMERON has somehow managed to re-surface miraculously and is now chasing him. He repeats this several times. Then he shouts while running off like a chicken without a head, briefcase in hand.]

WILLIAM: Help! Help! Terrible accident! Tragedy! Oh my God! What's happening?! Someone! Anyone! Help! Help!

SCENE 14

[BARBIE's dining-room. She and WILLIAM are sitting at the table eating a meal. They are both in funeral attire.]

BARBIE: Oh P-William, you've been so supportive.

WILLIAM: I think we've both helped each *other*, don't you?

BARBIE: I don't know how to thank you for giving that beautiful eulogy.

WILLIAM: *[Patting BARBIE's shoulder]* It was a lovely service, and that was the least I could do. I hope you'll take this from whence it comes but... I felt as though Cameron almost became like a daughter to me.

[BARBIE pats WILLIAM's hand.]

WILLIAM: *[Quietly]* They granted me stress leave today. Now that the investigation is complete.

[BARBIE nods acknowledgement.]

WILLIAM: I must say, everybody's been so helpful. *[Overcome]* Without that and the counselling I don't know if I could've... could've...

BARBIE: Shhhhhh, shhhh-shhh.

[WILLIAM takes a handkerchief out of his pocket. They sit in silence. Suddenly WILLIAM erupts, feigning uncontrollable distress.]

BARBIE: Oh, hush now.

WILLIAM: I tried desperately to grab her but it was too late! And even if I *had* she'd have pulled me in too! I told them, I told those bastards this was an accident waiting to happen, but oh no they wouldn't listen to me! And now guess what? They decide to put barriers up there! Now!

[Long pause. WILLIAM has a deep intake of breath. He and BARBIE embrace.]

SCENE 15

[WILLIAM stands at a podium, with the spotlight on him. He speaks into a microphone. TOBY and BARBIE are standing behind him.]

WILLIAM: Ladies and gentlemen. When I first sat down to write my latest play, *The Chrysanthemum Man*, I never dreamed that it would catapult me onto the international stage and that I'd be standing here tonight receiving this prestigious award. There is one special person to whom I have chosen to dedicate *The Chrysanthemum Man*. Cameron Hollis was a recent young student of mine whom I was lucky enough to get to know very well during our short time together. Gifted, a beautiful young woman both inside and out, she was taken from us far too soon in tragic circumstances which could so easily have been prevented. So Cameron, this one's for you!

[TOBY and BARBIE move to stand beside WILLIAM. He puts an arm around each of them. BARBIE is beaming and clapping but TOBY looks decidedly miserable, slumped with his arms folded. Sound of applause.]

CURTAIN.

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ADMIT ONE

&

**OTHER SHORT
PLAYS**

By
Guy Mulinder

ADMIT ONE

*A monologue
by
Guy Mulinder*

PROLOGUE

[Darkness.]

ANNOUNCER'S

VOICE: Ladies and gentlemen! It is a truly great honour to welcome to the stage for his opening address a young celebrity who needs no introduction. A veteran of the stage and screen - actor, director and writer - please put your hands together for... the one... and only... Gabriel Lockworth!

[Recorded applause. GABRIEL LOCKWORTH enters in a wheelchair. He is an attractive young man, late teens to early 20s. He speaks into a hand-held microphone. The only light is a spotlight on him. The stage is bare.]

GABRIEL: Thank you very much, thank you! The pleasure is all mine! *[Pause.]* The performing arts business is just like any other, it's about providing a service to the public. The Oscars and Tony Awards I've won over the years are flattering proof to me that I've succeeded in doing that. Being voted Sexiest Man in the World this year was a nice bonus too, so thanks for that!

[Pause.]

But let's turn to the matter at hand. You're probably all sitting on tenterhooks worrying about what kind of horrific injury has confined me to a Godforsaken contraption such as this! Well let me put you at your ease, there's nothing to worry about. I haven't been paralysed or maimed or anything like that! Not yet anyway. I am merely "in character", as they say.

[Pause.]

So, without further ado, I present for you this thought-provoking monologue in which I, Gabriel Lockworth, play the role of Gary Gray.

[END OF PROLOGUE.]

*[The lights go down to signify the start of the **monologue**. When the lights come up again, GABRIEL no longer speaks into a microphone. He is playing the role of GARY GRAY.]*

NB: *Although this is a monologue, GARY GRAY fully impersonates several characters including himself, and these **impersonations are indented**. The rest should be played as conspiratorial asides to the audience. There should also be as much movement as possible.]*

[The visual suggestion of a kitchen.]

GARY GRAY:

It all begins one morning at breakfast. You know the setup. Family around a table, one of them about to engage in that age-old sport... of bombshell-dropping.

[IAN has a gruff voice and a puffed up air – shoulders back, chest out, etc.]

IAN: How many times do I have to tell you my boy? What you study at university will affect your entire future.

GARY: I'm aware of that dad, I'm not stupid.

IAN: No, I know! I know you're not! Which is precisely my point! Isn't it about time you pulled your bloody finger out and tried to find something – *anything* - you actually.... want... to do?! *[Snorts noisily.]*

At this, mum gently taps dad's hand and says, "Oh Ian", in that way she has. But he pulls away.

IAN: You can't wrap the boy in cotton-wool all his life Janet, as much as you seem to disagree. You should follow in my footsteps my boy, you'd be in your element as a lawyer the way you like to argue.

GARY: *[Jocular]* I don't think so somehow dad. I don't have your capacity for sheer... full-of-shitness. *[Pause.]* I want to be... an actor.

[Pause.]

IAN: A what?

People always say that. Even though they heard you perfectly.

GARY: An actor. I want to be an actor.

[JANET is meek, and perpetually flustered.]

JANET: But... where did this come from?

GARY: From... inside me, mum.

JANET: You've never mentioned anything about this before.

GARY: Well, you never know. Maybe I *have* been acting. All my life.

That's one of those statements that just *sounds* good, you know? Well! It certainly has the desired effect!

JANET: What exactly is *that* supposed to mean?

IAN: Oh just ignore him Janet, he's being cryptic again, you know how he is, that's his answer to everything.

And dad's right too! Maybe I was *born* that way! Cryptic in both legs.

IAN: *[Sighing]* When I said try to find something you want to do, it goes without saying that I meant something through which a person in

your... position... stands at least a semi-reasonable chance... of actually... making... money. *[Snorts noisily.]*

I tell him money's never mattered to me. And he looks down at me over the top of his glasses.

IAN: *[Smarmy]* Um, yeah. We know. *[Pause.]* Well if you're serious about this... acting... thing... and it isn't just a phase like so much else in your life has been, then it's worth bearing in mind that, in reality, it's the director who's the *really* powerful guy.

GARY: Yeah but come on dad, let's be honest. Nine times out of ten, who gives a *shit* about the director? It's the actors who stand out. You asked me what I want to do and that's it. To be an actor. Nothing else.

IAN: Well *my* dream is to be an astronaut Gary, but it's just not gunna fuckin'-well happen is it?! *[Snorts noisily.]*

Mum clicks her tongue and adds another "Oh Ian" for good measure.

IAN: What's *your* dream Janet? Hm?

JANET: *[Wistfully]* To be an archaeologist and play the cello in an orchestra. If you really want to know.

IAN: Ah, there! You see! I rest my case. There you have it. Three utterly unrealistic dreams! So what do we do? We be practical. And we move on.

"Or," I find myself saying. "We become an actor, an astronaut, and a cello-playing archaeologist."

[Snap blackout. The visual suggestion of the lobby of the university's Theatre Department.]

And that's how I come to find myself waiting in the lobby of the university's Theatre Department the following day. Or should I say, waiting and waiting and waiting?! Until at long last, a woman marches briskly in.

[JUDITH has a quirky but efficient manner.]

JUDITH: Hello there! You must be Gary.

Well, if I must be I must be, I think to myself. But I only nod.

JUDITH: Salutations, I'm Judith, nice to meet you. Sincerest apologies for being so late! I actually thought we'd said half-past until I double checked my little black book. Would you like to come through to my "office", in inverted commas?

And naturally I would've loved to come through, had her door not been too narrow.

JUDITH: Oh dear, you've got your little gizmo all tangled up there. Let me help you.

And such is the reason for our first meeting taking place in the lobby.

JUDITH: So! Gary! Tell me! Which wheelchair sport do *you* play?

GARY: Chess.

Judith looks at me vaguely.

JUDITH: It's just that you weren't very specific when you requested an interview. I wasn't aware that you were um... physically challenged. What's your condition?

GARY: Perfect.

Judith looks puzzled. Disabled people aren't supposed to make jokes.

GARY: [*Nicely*] No, cerebral palsy. But I don't consider that to be an issue. Am I wrong?

JUDITH: Let's... wait and see. [*Pause. Brightly.*] So you want to study *acting*?

GARY: No, not really. I want to *do* it.

JUDITH: I see. Very... honest. Well, you certainly seem confident enough.

"That just shows you how good my *acting* is," I tell her. But again she doesn't laugh.

JUDITH: Do you want to be a stage or film actor?

GARY: Yes.

[*Pause.*]

JUDITH: Maybe Amy Brennan will give you the details of her agent.

I hate it when people just throw names into the conversation, don't you?
"Who's Amy Brennan?" I ask, instead of just nodding.

JUDITH: Ah! Well! I thought you in particular might perhaps have heard of her. She's getting quite famous here now, you know. A real up-and-coming talent! She's done the odd bit of stage work and has appeared in a couple of TV dramas. She'll too will be starting the course this year!

GARY: [*Dryly*] How nice.

JUDITH: [*Brightly*] Yes, isn't it! So! Shall I put your name down?

As though this Amy Brennan being in the course would somehow make all the difference.

JUDITH: E-Y or A-Y?

GARY: A.

[Pause.]

JUDITH: *[Sceptically]* G-A-R-Y-G-R-A-Y?

GARY: *[Frostily]* Correct.

She laughs then, for some reason or other. And at this point I remember something.

GARY: Oh by the way, I've made a special DVD for you. Telling you about myself and showing me doing a little bit of informal acting.

JUDITH: Oh how thoughtful! What a lovely idea! Well... You hang on to that and, um... yeah. *[Pause.]* And Gary, before you go, there's just one little thing I want to say to you about the theatre business. And that is.... be... prepared... to have your heart broken! Oh don't look like that, I'm only warning you. Because right now, you're standing outside the acting world and looking in, going, "I love you, I love you." But trust me! Theatre is not all it's cracked up to be. And now, having got that little unpleasantness out of the way, welcome aboard, Gary! Welcome aboard!

When my parents ask me for the umpteenth time that evening, "So? How did it go, tell us, tell us!" I tell them, "It was... unbelievable." And they are ecstatic.

[Snap blackout. Visual suggestion of a lecture theatre.]

On the day when I first see this Amy Brennan girl. she turns out to be exactly as I've imagined her. Annoyingly ladylike, annoyingly pretty, and annoyingly... perfect.

JUDITH: And last but not least, we have Gary and Amy. Which scene will *you* two be performing for the class today?

[AMY is demure and quiet-spoken.]

AMY: The "Get Thee to a Nunnery" scene. Act three, scene...

"Act three, scene one," I inform them. I mean, how can *anybody* not know that?

JUDITH: You have a very expressive face Gary. Maybe a little too expressive.

That's the nicest compliment Judith's given me so far!

JUDITH: Break a leg!

GARY: Er... speaking of breaking a leg Judith, could you just give me one moment?

And I start to lift myself, little by little, out of my wheelchair and onto an ordinary seat.
Judith checks her watch.

JUDITH: Can I... be of any assistance?

AMY: *[Frantic whisper]* What're you playing at Gary? You never told me you were going to do this! I didn't even know you *could*!

GARY: I'm making it up as I go along Amy. The best actors *do* that.

So Amy and I do the scene. And it goes okay I suppose, except Amy keeps forgetting her lines. Dumb blonde!

JUDITH: Well that was certainly... interesting. A mixed bag, it has to be said.

No Judith, I think to myself. I doesn't *have* to be said at *all*.

JUDITH: But Gary, it is *you* I am most disappointed in.

For a moment, this leaves me speechless! I shake my head. My nuances as Hamlet were spot on. And I *tell* her so. She gives Amy a look. They both seem to find that highly amusing.

JUDITH: My issues, Gary, were not with the recitation.

This woman needs to get her priorities right.

JUDITH: In the first place, no actor must give their partner line prompts. Ever! It's just not done. It turns everything into a school pantomime.

GARY: So what was I supposed to do?

But Judith sees fit to ignore this question.

JUDITH: My biggest gripe concerns your movement. Or rather, lack of it. You should've stayed in your wheelchair.

GARY: And been what, Judith? The first ever disabled Hamlet?

JUDITH: It would've given you far greater activity. Acting is about approaching a role from within yourself. From who *you* are.

Her lips continue to move but I switch off. We're only talking about one pathetic little five-minute scene, for God's sake!

GARY: I never allow my disability to stand in my way Judith. Not ever!

JUDITH: But don't you see Gary? That is exactly... what you did.

Stupid cow.

[Pause.]

After the performance, the only two people who haven't already run out the door are me and a scruffy little runt named "Kyle." He *looks* like a Kyle too! "Kyle." No offence! Anyway, the two of us are busy packing up our things and Judith goes, "Last one out, don't forget to switch off the lights" and leaves. Then this... "Kyle"... saunters over to me.

[KYLE has a swagger.]

KYLE: 'Ow ya doin' there mate?

I more or less manage a "Hello." But it probably looks as though I've sniffed a very unpleasant smell. Which... I have.

KYLE: Name's Kyle.

GARY: I know.

KYLE: Yeah.

"Kyle" was astoundingly eloquent.

KYLE: You enjoyin' the course, mate?

GARY: Yes.

KYLE: Yeah. 'Sgood innit? An' you're a great li'l actor aint'cha mate? Eh?

GARY: [Totally flat] So are you.

KYLE: Yeah? Aaaaw, fanks mate! Not as good as you though eh?

GARY: Oh... well I... wouldn't say that.

KYLE: Aaaaw yeah mate! 'Strue! No-one could *ever* be as good as *you*! Because, [cruel impersonation] "Your nuances as Hamlet were spot-on!" [normal again] Weren't they? [Pause.] Cocky li'l fucker aint'cha?" And cocky li'l fuckers've gotta be careful. And cocky li'l cripples've gotta be *doubly* careful eh? Yeah! Otherwise they might find they get the *shit* kicked out of them eh? Yeah! Well guess what, mate? Ya shit still stinks.

Then it goes behind my chair, and pulls it to the ground.

GARY: [Lacking conviction] I'll report you, you coward!

KYLE: [Emphatic whisper] Do that, cunt. And I'll break your 'ead open.

Then it kicks the chair, and leaves. After calling for help for what seems like an eternity, Judith appears. And she frets and fusses and fidgets.

JUDITH: How did this happen?

GARY: I... tried to do a wheelie. And...

But then of course I'm subjected to the whole, "I thought you were more mature than that" routine.

GARY: You won't... tell my parents... will you?

JUDITH: *[Sighs and clicks tongue]* Just stop trying to show off Gary!

She walks out shaking her head. And turns off the lights.

[Snap blackout. The visual suggestion of a cafeteria.]

"Do you know something?" I ask Amy one day.

AMY: Occasionally.

GARY: You look exactly like my very first girlfriend!

AMY: Really? How many've you had?

GARY: None.

[Pause.]

AMY: *[Giggles awkwardly]* Gary, are you asking me out?

GARY: Yep, how'm I doing?

AMY: You're doing okay!

GARY: Oh what a relief!

AMY: But we hardly even know each other.

GARY: Exactly! Why do you think I'm asking you *now*. Sorry, bad joke. You see, Amy... mine might not be the most significant heart in the scheme of things. But it's *my* heart. And it *likes* you. Very much.

[Pause.]

AMY: *[Giggles awkwardly]* Wow Gary, that's beautiful, where's it from?

GARY: From... inside me.

AMY: Gary, you're such a sweet person and of course I'm honoured and... and flattered. But... Well... Frankly I'd... feel more like your carer than your girlfriend.

Well! At least she's honest! I press on.

GARY: But Amy, we could make the most formidable duo. With you as... the professional actress and... me as... your coach.

AMY: *[Incredulous]* My coach?

GARY: *[Nodding excitedly]* Well, sure! You'd inspire me and... I'd inspire you!

Amazingly, at this point, she gets up and starts to leave!

AMY: Get over yourself Gary!

[Pause.]

GARY: Alright, alright, forget I said that. But what about going out with me, why not give it a try, I mean what's the worst that could happen?

AMY: *[Hard]* My boyfriend would probably be a little unhappy about it for one thing!

[Pause.]

GARY: You never told me.

AMY: You never asked. Or even gave me a *chance* to. But if you really want to know, he's in our class, his name's Kyle, you might know him.

[Pause.]

GARY: No. I... don't. *[Pause.]* And what if you hadn't had a boyfriend?

AMY: *[Snooty]* Well then I would probably have made the really bad mistake of going out with *you*! Goodbye Gary.

[Snap blackout. Visual suggestion of the inside of an old building with a winding staircase.]

With university theatre becoming less and less pleasurable for me, I soon start to look for some... *extra-curricular*... theatre classes to balance it with.

IAN: What do you want to do that for?

GARY: For... fun dad. Ever heard of it?

The first place we look at, we walk in the door and find ourselves at the foot of a winding staircase. Immediately, dad starts pacing.

IAN: *[Huffy]* I don't understand this. There's a big fuckin' sign saying "Drama classes upstairs." With an arrow! But no lift anywhere to be found!

JANET: *[Meekly]* No dear. This is a heritage building.

IAN: Hmph! Well what a stupid fuckin' place to have a drama class!

JANET: Oh Ian.

IAN: Well that's *one* we can cross off the list. Next!

"No!" I shout. "It's perfect!" Both mum and dad look at me as though I've gone mad.

GARY: It's like stepping back in time. As though some remarkable person has stuck cloves in millions and millions of oranges, and has hung them from floor to ceiling. And the scent has... bewitched us!

IAN: It's official. He *is* off his rocker.

JANET: Off his wheelchair more like.

I groan. And at this moment, a woman bounces in.

[DONNA has a loud jollity about her.]

DONNA: Hello, I'm Donna, can I help?

IAN: No, I "donna" think you can. *[Snorts noisily.]*

Dad really needs to stop trying to be witty.

DONNA: *[Pointing]* Does he want to join the class?

IAN: Why don't you ask *him*?

DONNA: *[Slowly cooing]* Do *you...* want to *join...* the *class*?

Here, dad seizes the chance for one of his infamous confrontations!

IAN: You obviously are not aware that you're discriminating against the disabled?

Donna looks blank.

IAN: *They* might want to take acting classes too you know. Or did that never occur to you?

DONNA: Sir, I'm... um... I'm... not the manager here, I'm, er... just the tutor.

IAN: Then may I suggest you go and "tute" somewhere else. *[Snorts noisily.]*

JANET: Oh Ian.

“I’m so sorry about this Donna,” I say sweetly. “My name’s Gary. And I’d dearly love to attend your Saturday morning sessions. Only, I can’t get up the stairs.”

DONNA: Well that’s no problem love. We’ll just move everything downstairs for your class.

From this moment on, I start to like the woman.

IAN: Is it heated?

DONNA: Yes sir, everywhere’s heated.

IAN: Hmph!

DONNA: The only thing is-

IAN: Ah! I knew it.

DONNA: Please... sir... let me finish. The only thing is, Gary, the oldest group here is still quite a few years younger than you by the look of it. Twelve to fourteen.

IAN: Oh well that’s bloody useless!

Dad starts marching swiftly towards the door.
“No! I don’t care,” I say. “I’ll start today!”

[Snap blackout. Visual suggestion of a room in the Drama Centre.]

And it turns out that the first few months I spend in these classes really aren’t bad at all! When I’m lucky, I get to be a tree. A very short tree. More like a stump. *[Pause.]* But then comes the “end of term play”, which the students have written themselves. With the inspirational title, *Group B’s Play*. Not even Group A. The so-called “play” was just one of those “gold coin donation” thingies. For... you know... family, friends... no-one important. But I put myself out for the sake of, “the team” and play the role of, “The Narrator.” So, anyway! The audience is all assembled, each person only having eyes for their own “talented little sweetheart.” Donna takes it upon herself to play Master of Ceremonies.

DONNA: *[Patronisingly sing-song]* Okay Narrator, take it away!

And the only slight glitch is, I take her rather too literally and end up pulling the whole curtain down *with* me. And it gets completely entangled in the wheels of my chair. That, I decide, is the end... of Saturday morning drama classes.

[Snap blackout. Visual suggestion of an office.]

Hence today’s... little... adventure, where I end up in the office of Artistic Director “Rafe Pennywhistle.” R-A-F-E.

[RAFE has very effeminate mannerisms, and an exaggerated plum-in-the-mouth accent.]

GARY: Thank you so much for agreeing to see me Mr Pennywhistle. I know it's not really the done thing.

RAFE: Please, call me Rafe.

I resist the temptation to ask if I really have to.

RAFE: Now. What can I do for you Gerry?

GARY: It's... Gary, actually.

RAFE: Right, right, good, good.

GARY: Well it's like this. What I want to do more than *anything* else in the world, and what I really feel I have an innate *talent* for, is to be an actor. But there are... um... certain... obstacles to this as I'm sure you can imagine.

RAFE: Right, right, good, good.

GARY: Now, I'm majoring in Theatre at university. But there's just not enough practical work for me to really... get my hands dirty. You know?

RAFE: Right, right. And um... what's your situation, er, Gerry? Are you at school or... university, or polytech or...?

GARY: [*Slightly put out*] I'm at the university. As I just said.

RAFE: Right, right. Studying what?

GARY: I'm majoring in Theatre.

RAFE: Oh *faaaaaabulous!* And how's that going for you?

GARY: Um... it's not particularly satisfying, as I've told you.

RAFE: Right, right, good good.

GARY: [*Hesitantly*] So... I wondered whether you, as Artistic Director of a leading professional theatre company, could find it in your heart to just put my name on file, and consider me for any bit-parts which might be going? Tiny Tim maybe, or something like that.

Rafe begins tapping his fingers on his desk.

RAFE: I'm sorry Gerry. It is simply not company policy to employ actors with no previous training or experience.

GARY: [*A whine*] But how do you suppose I'm ever to *get* that training or experience?

RAFE: Ah! Well *there* you're in luck. Because a completely new workshop, specifically designed for disabled actors, has recently been established by my part-... um... by a colleague of mine!

GARY: That's very noble!

RAFE: Yes, indeedy! Now what do you call *that* for a solution?

GARY: I call it, not applicable to me.

[Pause.]

RAFE: And why ever not, may I ask?

GARY: Because I am not a disabled actor, I am an actor who is disabled.

[Pause.]

RAFE: Now don't you think you're being a little-

GARY: No, I don't think I'm being anything. I wish to move away from my disability. Not towards it.

[Pause.]

RAFE: [Sighs] Well in that case Gerry, there is really nothing further for us to discuss-

GARY: [Stammering] Look, please... About what I was saying before... The shows you put on here are for the paying public, I know that. All I'm asking is for you to give me a *chance*!

Rafe rises and starts heading for the door.

RAFE: Listen Gerry, I'm a busy man. And I'm sorry that I can't be of service to you at present. But I very much appreciate you coming down here today and I wish you best of luck for the future. Now. If you'll excuse me-

GARY: [Desperate] Oh please! I'll play any part, any! No matter *how* small! And you wouldn't even have to *pay* me, I'd do it for *nothing*, I'm just so *desperate* to be part of a professional production!

RAFE: Well you can be part of the audience then Gerry, how's that?

GARY: But-

RAFE: Hey! Enough! Don't beg. Not attractive. You'll see yourself out won't you?

And that is how today's efforts conclude.

[Pause.]

The only question is... what is there left... to do... now?

[The lights go down to signify the end of the monologue.]

EPILOGUE

[Darkness.]

ANNOUNCER'S
VOICE:

What a mesmerising performance that was, wasn't it ladies and gentlemen? And now, to give his closing address, let's bring the lights up once again for the greatest young artist of our time and this year's Sexiest Man in the World... Oscar and Tony Award-winning legend... Mr Gabriel Lockworth!

[Recorded applause. GABRIEL LOCKWORTH speaks into a hand-held microphone. The only light is a spotlight on him. His manner is oddly subdued. The stage is bare.]

GABRIEL:

Ah, who am I kidding? Often, that which appears real is merely a shadow and vice versa. You see, the truth is, I am not an actor playing Gary Gray! I *am* Gary Gray. This is my *own* story! The only place Gabriel Lockworth exists is inside my head. As the legendary actor I will never become. The only reason I'm confiding this to all of you out there is because I'm sorry to say that you are no more real than Gabriel. You are one of my countless – or rather, *Gabriel's* countless - *imaginary* audiences, when I sit alone in my room every night with a microphone... *pretending*... to be him.

[The lights come up fully and reveal, for the first time, an actual set – that of GABRIEL's bedroom: bed, desk, chair, posters of legendary actors on the wall, etc.]

[Pause.]

But I would hate you to think of me as a pitiable figure. Rather, as a romantic and an innovator... who does the best he can. So thank you, ladies and gentlemen, the experience has been absolutely... unreal!

CURTAIN.

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THREE BAGS FULL

*A play
by
Guy Mulinder*

[A MAN and a WOMAN are seated at desks in a sterile room, an open door facing them. They wear formidable-looking black suits.]

WOMAN: *[Shouts]* Next!

[Forty-three year old JAMES SMITH enters tentatively and stands just inside the door. He is neatly dressed in a grey suit and tie. The MAN and WOMAN are writing, and do not lift their heads or stop what they are doing.]

JAMES: *[To the MAN]* Good morning sir, *[To the WOMAN]* and good morn-

MAN: Forward!!

[JAMES timidly approaches the MAN and WOMAN who make no attempt to welcome him. JAMES extends his hand, and tries again.]

JAMES: Good morning sir, and the same to-

WOMAN: Full name?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Excuse me ma'am?

[Pause.]

MAN: State... your... full... name!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Samuel Thomas James Smith sir. *[Pause.]* But I'm known as James.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while sighing, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes on their sheets of paper. The MAN and WOMAN simultaneously read aloud as they write.]

MAN & WOMAN: "Testimony of Samuel Smith"!

[Pause.]

WOMAN: Age?!

JAMES: Forty-three ma'am.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

MAN: Plea?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: What was that sir?

WOMAN: Guilty or not guilty?!

JAMES: Hang on a minute ma'am, this isn't a courtroom-

MAN: How... do... you... plead?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: *[Bewildered]* Er... not guilty sir.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

JAMES: May I sit down ma'am?

[Pause.]

WOMAN: You will speak only when you are spoken to.

[Pause.]

MAN: What did you utter, Smith?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: May I... sit down... sir?

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes. Pause.]

WOMAN: Do you see any chairs?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Well... no ma'am.

[Pause.]

MAN: Does that answer your question?!

[Pause. JAMES shifts awkwardly.]

WOMAN: Provide an explanation as to why you feel – open inverted commas – “homesick” – close inverted commas!

MAN: Your father - open inverted commas – “fought tooth and nail” – close inverted commas - to obtain you and your... kin... immigration into this country for a – open inverted commas – “better life” – close inverted commas.

JAMES: That's correct sir, he did.

WOMAN: And *is* it a – open inverted commas – “better life” – close inverted commas?

JAMES: Technically ma’am, I must admit it is. Far better. But that’s-

MAN: Then why do you not experience feelings of – open inverted commas – “gratitude” – close inverted commas? Or, for that matter – open inverted commas – “patriotism” – close inverted commas?

JAMES: Because my heart is not *in* this country sir and it never will be.

WOMAN: [*Theatrically*] Explain yourself!

JAMES: I can’t ma’am, I just... can’t.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

MAN: Then why do you grace this country with your long-suffering presence, Smith?!

JAMES: [*Exasperated*] Oh because I’m... entrenched here now aren’t I, I’m all nice and... settled in. So I make do. [*Pompous impersonation*] I’m – open inverted commas – “in the system” – close inverted commas.

[The MAN and WOMAN read aloud as they write.]

MAN & WOMAN: “The accused makes poor attempt at treasonous joke.”

[Pause.]

WOMAN: Occupation?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Um... I’m currently unemployed ma’am-

MAN: Your excuse being?!

JAMES: The credit crunch sir, the financial crisis! It’s hitting people hard! Not just me, most people!

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Childhood incident - open brackets “s” close brackets - contributing to your failure in life?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Pardon ma’am?

[Pause.]

MAN: State the childhood incident - open brackets “s” close brackets - contributing to your failure in life?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Oh I certainly don’t consider myself a failure sir!

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Qualifications?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Er... a B.A. ma’am! From the University of-

MAN: Just a B.A.?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Well sir... a B.A. is a lot of hard work!

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Religious beliefs?!

JAMES: I’m... agnostic ma’am-

MAN: So you’re incapable of making up your mind?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Without proof sir, yes.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Sexual orientation?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I’m bisexual and proud of it ma’am!

MAN: So yet again you are incapable of making up your mind?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: On the contrary sir, I've made up my mind that people of both genders are attractive.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Marital status?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Um... I'm divorced ma'am.

MAN: Number of offspring?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Three, sir.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

JAMES: One boy named-

WOMAN: Relationship status?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Um... I'm not actually *in* a relationship at the moment ma'am-

MAN: But you experience covert feelings of a romantic slash sexual nature for your so-called best friend's spouse?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I'm sorry sir?

WOMAN: Saying sorry won't do you any good whatsoever!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I'm not apologising ma'am, I'm asking this man to repeat what he just said!

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

MAN: *[Bored, singsong list]* Do you... or do you not... experience covert feelings... of a romantic slash sexual nature... for your so-called... best friend's... spouse?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I don't think that's any of your business sir!

[Pause.]

WOMAN: *[Extremely sinister]* I'll give you one... last... chance... Smith!

JAMES: My name's James! Or Mr Smith to you... *[can't help himself]* ma'am.

[The MAN and WOMAN read aloud as they write.]

MAN & WOMAN: "Samuel Smith's last warning."

[Pause.]

MAN: *[Extremely sinister]* Do you... or do you not... experience covert feelings... of a romantic slash sexual nature... for your so-called... best friend's... spouse... Smith?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I'll be laying a complaint against you two... *[can't help himself]* sir, ma'am!

WOMAN: *[Relishing the grammatical correctness]* With whom?!

MAN: Everybody works for us-

WOMAN: And those who don't-

MAN: Had better think again-

WOMAN: And quickly!

[The MAN and WOMAN give each other a high-five. Pause. JAMES shakes his head. He summons up courage, turns his back, and starts walking towards the door.]

MAN: I wouldn't do that!!

[JAMES pauses, then decides to keep walking. The MAN and WOMAN each remove a high-voltage gun from their desk drawers and shoot at JAMES, which gives him an electric shock. They keep the trigger pulled which means the shock continues, and JAMES is writhing in pain.]

JAMES: No, please sir, stop, have mercy ma'am, I beg you, alright, okay, I'm sorry, I'll co-operate!

[The MAN and WOMAN release the trigger of their guns, and the shock volts cease. They place the guns within reach on their desks. JAMES lies motionless for a time, but then painstakingly crawls back to their desks.]

WOMAN: Stand up!

JAMES: I can't ma'am.

MAN: Up!! Now!!

[With tremendous effort, JAMES pulls himself up, staggers to his feet, and stands unsteadily. There is a long pause, and then back to the same official tone as before.]

WOMAN: Relationship status?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Um... I'm not actually *in* a relationship at the moment ma'am-

MAN: But you experience covert feelings of a romantic slash sexual nature for your so-called best friend's spouse?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: *[Defeated]* Yes sir.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

JAMES: How the hell do you guys know that anyway?

WOMAN: We ask the questions Smith, not you!

MAN: And we hereby order you to terminate these feelings of a romantic slash sexual nature for your so-called best friend's spouse at once!

JAMES: *[Incredulous]* "Terminate" them sir?

WOMAN: They result in a downturn in productivity!

MAN: So we command you to dispense with these feelings altogether and be – open inverted commas – "happy" – close inverted commas.

[Pause.]

JAMES: *[Deadly serious]* I choose to keep things as they are sir, even if that means remaining miserable.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Frequency of masturbation?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: That's *also* highly personal ma'am-

MAN: *[Extremely sinister, hand hovering over gun]* Frequency... of...
masturbation?!

[Pause.]

JAMES: I don't know sir! Twice, three times a week?

WOMAN: This is a mandatory field!!

MAN: Numerical exactitude is a requirement!!

[Pause.]

JAMES: *[Embarrassed]* Four times a week sir.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes.]

WOMAN: Quality slash enjoyment of life on a continuum from zero to ten?!

MAN: With zero representing a complete lack of quality slash enjoyment of life, and ten representing maximum quality slash enjoyment of life!

WOMAN: Only whole numbers are acceptable!!

MAN: And strictly within the scale stipulated!!

[Pause.]

JAMES: *[Incredulous]* So you're asking me... to rate my life... out of *ten* sir?

WOMAN: Quality slash enjoyment of life on a continuum from zero to ten-!!

MAN: With zero representing a complete lack of quality slash enjoyment of life, and ten representing maximum quality slash enjoyment of life-!!

WOMAN: Only whole numbers are acceptable!!-

MAN: And strictly within the scale stipulated!!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Well... I'm not sure sir, um... about eight?

WOMAN: This is a mandatory field-!!

MAN: Numerical exactitude is a requirement!!

[Pause.]

JAMES: Eight sir.

[The MAN and WOMAN share a tired stare, shake their heads while giving another sigh, and they each put a cross in one of the boxes. Pause. The MAN and WOMAN read aloud as they write.]

MAN & WOMAN: The verdict in the case of Samuel Thomas James Smith versus the State is... guilty!

JAMES: But wait, I don't understand, guilty of what, what have I done?!-

[The MAN and WOMAN continue to read aloud as they write.]

MAN & WOMAN: And we sentence him to the harshest penalty possible under our judicial system!

JAMES: *[Terrified]* What, life imprisonment?!

[The MAN and WOMAN look straight at JAMES.]

MAN & WOMAN: Imprisonment in *life*!

CURTAIN.

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SOAPBOX

*A play
by
Guy Mulinder*

[An untidy flat. Two teenage buddies are sitting on a torn, stained, sunken couch. OLLIE is fat with wild hair; MIKE is thin with glasses; MIKE mustn't shorten his words into slang. NB: Brackets indicate more introverted dialogue.]

MIKE: Awww, who're we kidding? We've got nothing! We're just going to have to pay the goddamn rent some other way.

OLLIE: Whatcha *mean* we got nothin' man? What you tryna say?

MIKE: What don't you get about that, Ollie? We've got nothing! Zilch, zip, nada.

OLLIE: Ya know, that's what I just don't get 'bout you, Mikey! Addicted to negativity, man! Need to take a chill pill!

MIKE: It isn't negativity, it's reality.

OLLIE: (Fuck...)

MIKE: Practicality.

OLLIE: Look, all I'm sayin' is...

MIKE: Yeah?

OLLIE: Ssssh, just listen. I'm sayin'... All I'm sayin' is... (Shit!)

MIKE: Yeah, that's right. All you're saying *is* shit. And all *I'm* saying is, we've got to focus!

OLLIE: Focus?!

MIKE: Yeah, that what I'm talking about.

OLLIE: Who the hell says "focus"?

MIKE: Not *you* obviously.

[Long pause.]

MIKE: If we just pull ourselves together, we'll get *rich* from this shit!

OLLIE: You bet!

MIKE: People are really *into* soaps man!

OLLIE: They sure are.

MIKE: The only thing is...

OLLIE: What?

MIKE: Well...

OLLIE: Spit it out already!

MIKE: We don't have any connections. No *contacts*.

OLLIE: Aaaaaw, here we go 'gain! Mr Dreamcrusher! [*High pitched impersonation*] "We ain't got no connections, no *contacts*." (Fuckin' 'ell...) We'll figure all that shit out later, let's do some more goddamn writin' first, let's "focus"! I mean, we done five *episodes* already!

MIKE: Yeah, with no help, no... guidance, not a *clue* how we're doing!

OLLIE: 'Zackley! We don't need none of that crap! We got *talent* pal, that's what we got.

MIKE: We don't *know* that.

[*Pause.*]

OLLIE: Fuck you Mikey. Fuck you! You know what? Speak for yourself dude!

MIKE: I just think we should talk to someone in the *know*, someone in the *business*!

OLLIE: Aaaaaw, whadda they know! They'll go, "We'll just change this, we'll just tweak that, we'll just take all the credit." Screw that!

MIKE: If they even take it at all.

OLLIE: Hmmm? Well what you mean, why *wouldn't* they take it?

MIKE: Might not think it's any *good* Ollie.

OLLIE: Then I say it 'gain. Screw that, whadda they know!

MIKE: (Fine...)

OLLIE: Right. So just focus Mikey man, just... "focus"!

[*Long pause.*]

OLLIE: I mean, I *knew* the whole "love triangle" thing would work, didn't I tell you that, eh, eh?

MIKE: No, you said we could "probably get away with it."

OLLIE: Ah. [*Clears throat.*] Yeah, well, you see? We *did*! *Tolja* we would!

MIKE: (Jesus...)

[Pause.]

OLLIE: There's no reason why it *wouldn't*ve worked. We got it all set up so sweet dude. An' Rick and Sonia have such great chemistry together!

MIKE: On the page.

[*OLLIE gives MIKE a look.*]

OLLIE: Yeah 'course on the page, duh, whadda ya think! Don't *fuck* with me man!

MIKE: (Okay okay, shit...) [*Pause.*] All that... sexual tension between them!

OLLIE: "Sexual tension"?! What the fuck you *on* man? That what college does to you?

MIKE: I guess so.

OLLIE: Glad I ain't there then. [*Snorts*] "Sexual tension."

MIKE: I love that expression! It's so...

OLLIE: Gay?

MIKE: Trendy.

[*Pause.*]

OLLIE: [*Shrugs*] If you say so dude.

[*Pause.*]

MIKE: Well, more episodes aren't going to write themselves are they?

OLLIE: [*Sighing*] Wow, that's like... super deep man!

MIKE: That's the trouble with soap operas, they just keep going and going and going!

OLLIE: Like your mouth.

MIKE: [*Sarcastically*] Ooooooooooh, ouch!

OLLIE: Anyway, I thought that was the *goal* man!

MIKE: Well, it is, but... (You know what I mean...)

OLLIE: There just ain't no pleasin' you Mikey is there?

MIKE: Look, shut it will you!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Well, now that we got Rick and Sonia all smoochy smoochy, folks'll wanna know what happens next!

MIKE: We hope.

[OLLIE gives MIKE a tired look.]

OLLIE: So we gotta leave them in suspense for... for a... *suspeeeensful* 'moun' o' time! *Juuuuuuuuust* long enough that they'll come back for more!

MIKE: We hope.

OLLIE: [Sighs] To see when – or even *if* – Rick's wife finds out! Ya get me?

MIKE: Yeah yeah, we... *distract* people with a totally different story line in the meantime, ya think?

OLLIE: [Does a thumbs-up] Ah, you learnin' man, you learnin'!

MIKE: Right, so what've you got?

[Long, awkward pause.]

OLLIE: Well...

[Long, awkward pause.]

MIKE: You want to know where *I* reckon we've been going wrong Ollie?

OLLIE: (Aaaaaw, fuck, what?!) No! No Mike, I don't! What you mean, "goin' wrong", who's gone wrong? We done great so far man, Jesus dude!

MIKE: On *principle* Ollie, wrong on *principle*!

OLLIE: What *you* know 'bout principles Mike, hm?

MIKE: We haven't done any planning.

OLLIE: Aw, here we go 'gain! What we wanna plan for? *Live* a little man, shit!

MIKE: We've just been making it up as we go. We've been... winging it.

OLLIE: Hey, what's wrong with that, dude? Ain't done us no harm so far.

MIKE: Yeah... no, but... can we... sustain it?

OLLIE: [Cracks up] Ha! Will you listen to the cocksucker! "Can we sustain it?"

MIKE: Can we keep it going?

OLLIE: I know what sustain means.

MIKE: Well?

OLLIE: ‘Course we can, no probs!

MIKE: How?

OLLIE: (Um...) You tell me!

[Pause.]

MIKE: Well, I have here...

[MIKE reaches and finds a big sheet of paper and some marker pens, and puts them on the table.]

MIKE: ...these.

OLLIE: *[Dryly]* Congrats Mike.

MIKE: There’s nothing better than a good brainstorm!

OLLIE: You seriously need to get out more man.

MIKE: *[Sighing]* I meant for *this*.

OLLIE: *[Saying the word to himself]* Brainstorm... brainstorm.

MIKE: You can’t just say it man, you have to *do* it.

OLLIE: It’s such a cool word though! But it *should* mean somethin’ even more... extreme, ya know what I mean? Like... a headache. Or even... a nervous breakdown! “I had a total brainstorm!”

MIKE: No, that’s “brain *freeze*.”

OLLIE: (Fuckin’ smartass). Well I reckon brain-*storm* is even more... you know!

[Pause.]

MIKE: Ollie?

OLLIE: What?

MIKE: Zip it. Fo-cuss!

OLLIE: Aaaaaw, change the record dude!

MIKE: So! We put the episode number in the middle.

OLLIE: Six!

MIKE: I *know* it's six!

OLLIE: Oh, well 'scuse me!

MIKE: And then we-

OLLIE: Do a circle round it, yeah yeah.

MIKE: Er, are you doing the talking or am I?

[Small pause.]

OLLIE: Me!

MIKE: (Goddammit...)

OLLIE: An' then we draw lines off it, *everybody* knows that!

MIKE: Mm-hm. Branches.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Say 'gain?

MIKE: Branches.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: But this ain't no... tree thingy.

MIKE: *[Floundering]* I... Look, just draw the damn lines will you!

[OLLIE smiles to himself and draws more lines coming off the circle.]

MIKE: (Geez...!)

OLLIE: Don't say geez, real men don't say geez! *[Pause.]* Right!

MIKE: Right!

[They sit, pens at the ready. Awkward pause.]

MIKE: Well?

OLLIE: Whadda ya mean, "Well?"

MIKE: What are your ideas?

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Um...

[Long pause.]

MIKE: (Great. That's just great...)

OLLIE: C'mon Mike man, you're... you're better at this shit than me.

MIKE: Bullshit.

OLLIE: You *are* and you know it!

MIKE: Bull-frigging-*shit*.

OLLIE: [*Incredulously*] "Friggin'"?

MIKE: Why, because I like mindless crap, is that what you're hinting at?

OLLIE: This ain't "mindless crap", what the hell you on 'bout?

MIKE: Well, it isn't exactly... high-brow is it Ollie?

OLLIE: Well who gives a fuck 'bout high-brow, Mike?

MIKE: Hey, listen. I go to college, I know what I'm talking about.

OLLIE: Well, then... save it for college. Why d'you even need *me* then dude?

MIKE: Hmmm... two heads are better than one.

OLLIE: Aw, God, I *hate* that expression man! Makes us sound like fuckin' Siamese twins! [Pause.] But it damn well ain't mindless crap!

MIKE: Well what is it then?

OLLIE: It's... it's... a soap!

MIKE: I rest my case!

OLLIE: Well soaps ain't mindless, they... (I ain't got the patience for this shit) ...they... show real life.

MIKE: [*Scoffs*] Yeah, sure! Your life maybe, but not normal folk.

OLLIE: I ain't gunna... sink to that level man! I got standards.

MIKE: Standards? Where are they? [*Goes down on hands and knees and scours the floor.*] Oh yeah, down here.

OLLIE: Fuck off.

MIKE: Answer me this then buddy. If soaps *do* show real life then why do folk need to sit and watch it, why can't they just... I dunno.... walk down the street and see it for themselves?

OLLIE: Because if they see a... fake reality that they can... *dig* for half an hour, then that'll make 'em feel *good* 'bout themselves. An' even if they *don't* dig it, that'll *still* make 'em feel good 'bout themselves.

MIKE: But Jesus, I mean if that's what these folk need in order to feel good about themselves, then... *[shrugs.]*

OLLIE: Well if you're gunna take *that*... (what's the word?)... *approach*, then why we doin' it man?

MIKE: *[Smiling]* Oh I think you know the answer to that don't you Ollie?

OLLIE: *[Smiling]* Well, um... yeah, I guess I do. (Fuckin' rent money...).

MIKE: Hey listen, you were there, the guy said it was our last warning. And he's got big frigging muscles man! I dunno about you but *I still want* all my teeth!

OLLIE: I'd've thought you'd *dig* men with *[high-pitched, camp impersonation]* "Big frigging muscles."

MIKE: Not when I – we - owe them money. *[Pause.]* So! Back to work?

OLLIE: *Start* workin', you mean?

MIKE: Fair enough. If you tell me your ideas first.

OLLIE: An' if I don't?

MIKE: Then... we *still* aren't going to get anywhere are we?

OLLIE: *[Sighs]* Fine. Well I was sorta thinkin'...

MIKE: Yeah?

OLLIE: I was... sorta thinkin'...

MIKE: Yeah?

[Pause.]

OLLIE: An' then I stopped.

MIKE: *[Clicks tongue]* (Fan-bloody-tastic...)

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Should we go grab some lunch?

MIKE: It's 10:30!

OLLIE: Well... breakfast then!

MIKE: You got the concentration span of a goddamn five-year-old, ya know that?

OLLIE: *That* high?

MIKE: *[Dubiously]* Well... *[Pause.]* Aaaaaaanyway! We're drifting again.

OLLIE: Flowin'.

MIKE: No, we are not flowing, we are drifting.

OLLIE: Well... (fuck this)... if you'd just tol' me your sucky ideas from the start!

MIKE: Alright, alright, you want my ideas?

OLLIE: Yep!

MIKE: You want my ideas?

OLLIE: Yep!

[Pause.]

MIKE: Let's grab some breakfast!

OLLIE: Ah, see, see? I knew it!

MIKE: That make you happy does it?

OLLIE: Oh you have no idea! *[Realises his own pun.]* Ha! "You have no idea"! Get it?

MIKE: Yeah yeah. (So funny I forgot to laugh...) When are we going to have time to get any damn work done on this shit if we don't use this weekend, hm, hm? How many times do I have to tell you, if we don't pay up by the fifth we'll be out on our ears!

OLLIE: *[Incredulously]* "Out on our ears"?!

MIKE: Well we *will* be.

OLLIE: Who the *fuck* says, "Out on our ears"?!

MIKE: Agh!... (You know what I mean...)

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Aaaaw, c'mon Mikey boy, lighten up for Chrissake! You're always actin' like you got a fuckin' carrot up your ass. Mind you, knowing you you prolly do!

[MIKE looks at OLLIE contemptuously.]

OLLIE: Hey, I know! Let's be gettin' one of the characters facin' 'zackley the same... thing we facin' now!

MIKE: What are you getting at Ollie?

OLLIE: This. This! [Gestures around him.] The struggle of the... "creative... creative..."

MIKE: Process.

OLLIE: That one! Ya dig it? For the young guy! (What's the fucker's name?) Jamie. We already shown he likes to write... [Shrugs] stuff!

MIKE: Yeah, so?

OLLIE: So maybe Jamie's doin' a school project with his best friend, er... we'll call him... Todd!

MIKE: Todd?!

OLLIE: You got somethin' 'gainst that name dude?

MIKE: Well no, but-

OLLIE: 'Kay, so!

MIKE: (Kill me now...)

OLLIE: So Jamie and Todd's doin' this school thingy where they gotta write some shit together, yeah? Only, they get sorta like... dried up, ya know?

MIKE: O...kay, and?

OLLIE: An' so Jamie's like, "You got any ideas?" An' Todd goes, "You first." An' Jamie's like, "Shall we grab some breakfast?" An' Todd goes, "Come on man, this shit's important!" An' Jamie's like, "Well? I'm hungry! You got any *better* ideas?" An' Todd goes, "Yeah I have, dipshit!" Jamie, he's like, "What you got?" An' then there's this big, like... pause, you know? [Starts cracking up] An' then Todd goes, "Let's grab some breakfast!"

[Pause.]

MIKE: Hm-hm?

OLLIE: *[Still laughing]* Killer, dude! Killer!

MIKE: And then?

OLLIE: What?

MIKE: *[Pointedly]* And then?

[Pause.]

OLLIE: *[Excitedly]* An' then... they... keep takin' each other off topic till they don't never get nothin' done at *all*!

MIKE: (Wow...)

OLLIE: Yeah?

MIKE: That'll bring the frigging crowds in won't it? I mean, they'll come *flocking*!

OLLIE: Ya think so?

MIKE: No! (Have I died and gone to hell?...)

[Pause. OLLIE stops laughing and becomes just plain annoyed.]

OLLIE: Well, that's what me and you's goin' through right now ain't it? That's your "real life" for ya!

MIKE: *[Wearily]* Aaaaaw, come off it Ollie, stop farting around.

OLLIE: Oh yeah? Yeah? You reckon you can do better, motherfucker? Eh?

MIKE: I *know* I can!

OLLIE: Okay. Shoot!

[Pause.]

MIKE: Hey, now that's an idea right there! Oh ye-ya, *check that out*!

OLLIE: What is?

MIKE: Someone gets shot!

OLLIE: Great. Allow me.

MIKE: *[Groans]* No, seriously!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Fine. Who d'ya got in mind?

MIKE: Oh I don't know. Who do you not like on the soap?

OLLIE: Hmmmm.... (Shit...) That's a mighty long list there.

MIKE: I thought you liked *all* the characters.

OLLIE: Well yeah, I... *like* all o' them but I don't... *liiiiike* all o' them, if you get me.

MIKE: (I don't.)

OLLIE: Well anyways it's a stupid idea man!

MIKE: (You *would* say that...)

OLLIE: I mean, shit! We only done five goddamn episodes, an' already you wanna kill some poor fucker off?

MIKE: Well, he doesn't have to, like... *die* from it an' all. The shot could just be... *you* know!

OLLIE: Miss?

MIKE: No, not miss! Be... "wounding", that's the word. "Wounding."

[Pause.]

OLLIE: (Fuckin' 'ell...) [Cut-glass English accent] Oh don't worry, um... chaps, it's nothing, it was only wounding! [Normal again] Okay, who gets... "wounded" then? An' by who?

MIKE: Whom.

OLLIE: What?

MIKE: By *whom*.

OLLIE: Yeah, who gets wounded, an' by who?

[MIKE gives OLLIE a look.]

MIKE: Aaaaaw man, those are just details!

OLLIE: Oh yeah? An' what's happened to Mr [high pitched impersonation] "We ain't got no connections, no *contacts*"? He ain't here no more?

MIKE: And the audience'll be going, "Will he make it or won't he, will he make it or won't he? Oh, whew, he does!"

OLLIE: *[Timidly]* Or *she*.

MIKE: Hm?

OLLIE: Or *she*.

[MIKE looks at OLLIE and sighs exasperatedly. Pause.]

MIKE: Oh, let's forget it, you've ruined it now man, totally ruined it!

OLLIE: (Yippee...)

MIKE: And anyway, there must be some easier shit than that.

OLLIE: Well... fire away.

MIKE: Hey, that's *another* good one!

OLLIE: What you talkin' 'bout dude?

MIKE: Fire! Arson!

[OLLIE groans.]

MIKE: That's a frigging awesome idea. That way, nobody has to get killed or injured or crap like that, but it can still kick some serious ass!

OLLIE: But we'd still need a... reason, man, a... a motive.

MIKE: Ah, but not necessarily! Folks burn stuff down for the sake of it all the time, duh!

OLLIE: That would be some boring shit though man, I mean let's face it!

MIKE: *Now* who's being frigging annoying?

OLLIE: *You* are, sayin' *friggin'* all the fuckin' time. And anyways, I'm bein' realistic dude. You know? That, "real life" thing 'gain?

MIKE: (Shit...) Yeah well let's give realism a break for a while.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: *[Sighing]* Fine. But same question then. What gets burnt down an' by who?

MIKE: Well, like I said, it'd need to kick some serious ass. So! What's the main building on the soap? *[Pause.]* Well? *[Pause.]* C'mon man, it's not rocket science.

OLLIE: The pub.

MIKE: Yeah, hallelujah!

OLLIE: But the show's *set* in that goddamn pub.

MIKE: So?

OLLIE: So where's that leave us when the thing goes up in smoke, Mr Einstein?!

MIKE: Details pal, minor details!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Not to mention, what 'bout ol' Mary-Sue? I mean, basically her only line so far's been... Oh I dunno... [*Mellifluous impersonation*] "One Jack Daniels comin' right up, sugar." An' if she ain't got that, what the hell's she there for? (Jesus...)

MIKE: Well perhaps that's our answer. Maybe *she* burns down the pub!

OLLIE: Why the fuck would she burn down her own pub? Huh? Why the *fuck*?

MIKE: To get the insurance money numbskull!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: An' you really think a crusty ol' crow like Mary-Sue would do that?!

MIKE: That's the whole point! Nobody would ever, like... suspect that sort of crazy shit! If that doesn't guarantee us good ratings, nothing will!

OLLIE: That all you care about man, ratings? What about the... "truth of the character"?

MIKE: Who gives a flying...? Who *cares* about that?

OLLIE: The viewer's do! That's who. An' if we "keep it real", the ratings'll go up *anyways*. We gotta let the juicy bits come outa the story, not the other way round, ya get me?

MIKE: *Now* who's the smartass!

OLLIE: But we can't do nothin' if we ain't got good ideas.

MIKE: So? Get some!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: How ‘bout goin’ back to that fucked-up little teen-queen Linda? We already got her bein’ ploughed by that guy Luke. Pretty obvious what comes next ain’t it?

MIKE: She gets knocked up.

OLLIE: Yep, bang on! [*Snorts at the pun.*]

MIKE: That story’s been done, like... a gazillion times though.

[*OLLIE gives MIKE a look.*]

OLLIE: (Jesus...) This is a *soap* Mikey.

MIKE: (Fair enough...)

OLLIE: Cliché kingdom man!

MIKE: But it doesn’t *have* to be, that’s all I’m saying.

OLLIE: There ain’t nothin’ wrong with goin’ where the audience would want. Only decent idea we got so far anyways.

MIKE: In *your* opinion.

OLLIE: ‘Course in my ‘pinion! (Fuck...)

MIKE: Well alright then, write the goddamn thing down if you want, I couldn’t give a shit any more.

[*OLLIE sighs, and writes it down.*]

OLLIE: Great! How ‘bout we try doin’ some dialogue, see how it goes?

MIKE: No, we’ve got to plan it all out first -

OLLIE: Aaaaw Jesus, there ya go ‘gain with your fuckin’ plannin’. Plan-shman dude! Ya know somethin’? That’s what’s screwed up ‘bout the whole fuckin’ *world* man. Too much plannin’, not ‘nough doin’! Too much... workin’ out what each character’s grandmother had for breakfast, all that crap.

[*Pause.*]

MIKE: Speaking of breakfast...

OLLIE: Don’t go there man.

[*MIKE sighs. OLLIE takes out his laptop, and turns the screen so that they can both read it easily. From now on, where appropriate, he reads aloud as he types.*]

OLLIE: “Linda’s pregnancy scare, scene one.”

MIKE: Okay, so picture this. We start with a shot of Linda coming out of the bathroom, yeah? And she's holding one of those... pregnancy test kit things, what are they called?

OLLIE: A... "pregnancy test kit"?

[MIKE gives OLLIE a look.]

MIKE: Whatever. So anyway, she looks down at it, and we can see her thinking "Oh God..."

OLLIE: Nice, dude, nice! So! What do I put?

MIKE: We've just been through that.

OLLIE: Yeah yeah, tell me 'gain.

MIKE: C'mon! *You* try!

OLLIE: [Sighs.] "Linda's pregnancy scare, scene one. Linda comes out of the ba-"

MIKE: No, we've got to make the writing more fancy. *Emerges* from.

OLLIE: "Emerges from the bathroom, holding a pregnancy test kit in her hands."

MIKE: Where else would she be holding it?!

[OLLIE gives MIKE a look.]

OLLIE: Fuck you! "A... horrified look... *crosses*... her face."

MIKE: Yeah, this is gold, solid gold!

OLLIE: "An' she whispers to herself, 'Oh my God! I'm pregnant!'"

MIKE: [Winces] Naaaaaaah! (Shit...) We need *subtext*!

OLLIE: Sub-what? What the fuck?!

MIKE: That just completely.... (Jesus...) Nobody talks to themselves unless they're totally off the cuckoo clock!

OLLIE: I talk to myself all the *time*!

MIKE: Again, I rest my case.

OLLIE: You *never* rest your case Mikey! [Pause.] So how do we... um...?

MIKE: We don't need to. It runs really sweet just like that.

OLLIE: What, you sayin' that's the first scene done?

MIKE: You bet! We've written a whole scene, we're *cooking*!

OLLIE: We could... have her do the test thingy 'gain to make sure.

MIKE: That'd be pointless.

OLLIE: Not pointless at all dude! If I was pregnant, I'd wanna double check, that's all.

MIKE: If you were pregnant Ollie, I'd want to double-check too.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: 'Kay, we da bomb! So what next?

[Long, awkward pause.]

MIKE: Yep.

[Long, awkward pause.]

MIKE: How 'bout! Instead of making her get knocked up! We make her ask herself, after sleeping with Luke, is she really into men at *all*?

OLLIE: (Aaaaaw Jesus, here we go?) What they call that shit at your... college place?

MIKE: A "sexual identity crisis."

OLLIE: (Fuck me...)

MIKE: Exactly.

[Pause. OLLIE looks at MIKE blankly, oblivious to the irony. The, his wit returns.]

MIKE: Well, you know what they say.

OLLIE: "Sexual identity crises make the world go round."

MIKE: That isn't quite what they say Ollie.

OLLIE: Well, *some*thin' like that anyways.

MIKE: One thing though.

OLLIE: Yeah?

MIKE: Gays sell better than lezzies.

OLLIE: What?! (Holy crap...) You *would* say that wouldn't you Mikey!

MIKE: It's a fact! Look around you! *[Pause.]* So why not make Luke turn gay after sleeping with Linda, not the other way round?

OLLIE: Aha! I knew you'd bring fuckin' biography into it sometime.

MIKE: *Auto-biography.*

OLLIE: Whatever. (Shit...)

MIKE: Hey, ya can't go wrong with that! Unless of course folks start recognising themselves. 'Cause if *that* happens, you spend your whole damn life going, "What? Is *that* what you think? Oh my God, I had no idea, no of course it isn't you! Looks like you. Sounds like you. Acts like you. *Smells* like you. But it definitely isn't you."

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Hey! What if Luke was bi?

MIKE: Nah, most folks don't *get* that shit. Not... black and white enough.

OLLIE: Speakin' of black an' white...

MIKE: Oh please, let's leave the race ideas till after lunch.

OLLIE: Hey! Lunch!

MIKE: No!

[OLLIE sighs, and writes on the diagram. Pause.]

OLLIE: But hang on a sec man! We already *got* one gay guy. Danny.

MIKE: Hey, even better! And Danny's single, right?

[OLLIE nods suspiciously]

MIKE: So! Danny starts picking up Luke's homo vibes on his gaydar, and-

OLLIE: (Christ...) Does that shit really happen?

MIKE: Oh, sure!

OLLIE: Do *I*... give off any... gay vibes?

MIKE: You?! Why, something I should know about?

OLLIE: Hope not. *[Too quickly changing the subject.]* So anyways, say 'gain?

[MIKE notices this cover-up and smiles to himself.]

OLLIE: Danny starts pickin' up Luke's gay vibes, an' then...?

MIKE: Danny confronts Luke. Luke goes, *[Impersonation]* "What you talkin' 'bout fool?", and punches Danny in the nose. *Maaaaaajor* shit happens. Luke feels bad. Luke and Danny make up. Luke and Danny kiss. Luke feels all screwy inside. Luke lashes out at everything and everyone in sight, but slowly, slowly, he starts to... you know! Luke dumps Linda and confesses but they stay friends. Luke and Danny get together-

OLLIE: Hey hey, hold it, hold it.

MIKE: What?!

OLLIE: Sorry to drag you outa fantasy land man, but there's a difference 'tween "satisfyin' folks's expectations", and just bein' fuckin' boring! That's even too much for "cliché kingdom" dude! Every single goddamn gay teen movie in the entire *world* has that plot!

MIKE: Aha, so you *do* watch them then?!

OLLIE: *[Sighing]* Mike?

MIKE: Yeah.

OLLIE: Let's scrap it.

[MIKE groans. Long pause.]

OLLIE: I wanna bring in a brand spankin' *new* character!

MIKE: Good idea! Will this new character have a sexual identity crisis too?

OLLIE: Oh, dude, just forget 'bout your fuckin' sexual identity crisis for five minutes will ya!

MIKE: *[Shrugs; haughtily]* Alright. But only for five minutes.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: What about makin' it a young woman... who's...?

MIKE: Oh, 'course, a young woman, how'd I guess?

[OLLIE gives MIKE a look.]

OLLIE: A young woman who's... *crippled!*

[Pause.]

MIKE: Disabled.

OLLIE: *[Shrugs]* Same diff.

[Pause.]

MIKE: Why?

OLLIE: Why not? But I'm talkin' like... propply disabled, like... from birth.

[OLLIE writes this idea on the diagram. Pause.]

MIKE: And what would this chick... *do*?

OLLIE: Do? Oh I dunno man, she don' have to "do" *anything* for a while. She could just be... *there*.

[Pause.]

MIKE: Well I s'pose that way we could at least get a real *live* disabled chick to play her.

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Hmmmmm.... Nah dude... Wouldn't be hot enough.

MIKE: What?! Ollie, how the hell can you *say* that shit?

OLLIE: Well...

MIKE: (Jesus...) If you going to have that sort of attitude... (I mean, frigging hell...)... why not make the character a... a disabled black lezzie and be done with it! Hm? A "physically challenged"... "ethnically challenged"... "sexually challenged"... exhibit!

[Pause.]

OLLIE: Right, that's it. Ya know somethin' man? I gotta tell ya this. It's 'zackley that kinda talk that really pisses me off 'bout people like you!

MIKE: "People like me."

OLLIE: Yeah. You fuckin' collegey mammas' boys! Nothin' anybody says is ever fuckin'-well good enough for you guys is it man? Just 'cause you get off on usin' long goddamn words, you think you're so much better than everybody else.

MIKE: Well...

OLLIE: Well what?

MIKE: Maybe it's... because we *are*.

OLLIE: What, you think you better than me dude, huh?

MIKE: Well, um... am I under oath?

OLLIE: Under what? You should *hear* yourself man, yak yak yak all day long.

MIKE: Yeah? Well at least I talk *sense*!

OLLIE: You're jokin' me, right? I get fuckin' sick an' tired of listenin' to your *whinin'* man!

MIKE: You don't *listen* at all Ollie, that's your *problem*. You just go... lumbering through life. (Only ever do what *you* want to do...)

OLLIE: Aaaaw, fuck off man. (Jesus...)

MIKE: Leaving your stinking shoes on the table. Drinking milk from the bottle.

OLLIE: Well why the fuck did you take me on as a flatmate in the first place dude, huh, if you're so fuckin' high an' mighty?

MIKE: Well I didn't know you'd be all brawn and no brain did I?

OLLIE: What the hell does *that* crap mean? There, ya see? Ya see what I'm sayin'? I never have a fuckin' clue what you're talkin' 'bout man! (Fuckin' dickhead...) Bet you fancied me didn't you eh? That's why you let me move in!

MIKE: You?! Why would I fancy *you*?!

OLLIE: Faggots always think they're too fuckin' good for anybody else anyways.

MIKE: What?! Oh is that so?

OLLIE: Yeah it is! Always shovin' it down everybody's fuckin' throats like goddamn... sexual bible-bashers! [*Camp impersonation*] "Join our club, you *know* you *want* to." Well you can take your lousy fuckin' writing *and* your lousy fuckin' flat, and shove 'em up your puny little ass!

[*OLLIE storms out and slams the door behind him. MIKE sighs. Long pause.*]

MIKE: [*Bitterly ironic, to himself*] Well... I guess *that* could make a good scene.

CURTAIN.

SHELF LIFE

*A monologue
by
Guy Mulinder*

[Thirty-nine year old LAVINIA MOON is in her lounge, dressed in brightly-coloured clothing.]

LAVINIA: So on the morning of the big day, I'm waking up languidly and I can feel the sun streaming into the room! I reach over to give Steve a cuddle but, *[hammy]* "There is no-one in the bed beside me." Steve is making me breakfast in bed, I think to myself. Yes, that must be it! I smile and snuggle back down.

Steve ends up taking rather a long time making the breakfast, because when I wake up three quarters of an hour later it isn't thanks to him. He still never knows where anything is. He's only lived with me for a year! But when my parents were still alive they'd say to me time and again, "Never be in a big hurry to get married, always live with somebody first. You'll probably find they come tumbling off their pedestal very quickly!" Then they would look at each other wearily.

Oh well, it's the thought that counts with Steve. So I bravely face the day, put on my dressing-gown and slippers, and go down to help him with his "surprise." But the only surprise is an envelope on the kitchen table, with a note scribbled on the outside. "Happy thirty-ninth birthday Lav! Off for a game of golf with Stan. Buy yourself something nice. Steve."

That evening, my parting words to Steve – when I finally get him to turn off the TV and take his dirty shoes off the couch – are, "All brutes use clubs, but you left your balls at home!" Look on the bright side, I tell myself! With Steve gone, no more leaving the toilet seat up. No more dirty washing lying around. Aaaaaah, bliss!

[Pause.]

You know, everybody thinks my being a fashion editor's like... this really glamorous thing. They don't realise how bloody depressing it is being constantly surrounded by pert young stick insects, eating like horses and never putting on an ounce! Sometimes, I'm sitting munching on my celery and thinking, It isn't that I *begrudge* them for being... twenty-two and... gorgeous. How could I? It's just that... well actually it *is*! Fuck them!

The morning after Steve leaves with his tail between his legs, I'm suddenly struck by the woman opposite me. She's the mirror image of me, except *she* has wrinkles and a few grey hairs. She takes it upon herself to remind me that this year is my last chance to find Mr Right before I hit "The big four-O." I hate people like that, don't you?

[Pause.]

Well, Steve's... successor – although "successor" is a rather poor choice of word – is a man named Jeremy Clarke, who works in advertising. But can you keep a secret? *Conspiratorial whisper* You'll never guess where I end up meeting the guy. On an internet

dating site. *[Normal again.]* I always said I'd never be seen dead using one of those but then one day I think to myself, Don't be so goddamn snobbish Lavinia!

And I soon find that the whole thing turns out to be quite a bizarre concept because it's like a "Designer Date." I mean, usually the initial attraction is by looks and then you kind of hope the personality lives up to them, which invariably it doesn't. But internet dating is the other way round, which *should* be miles better! Anyway, what initially attracts me to Jeremy is that he says on his profile page, "Money is of no consequence to me whatsoever. The best things in life are free." He says further down that he lives with his elderly mother, and I must confess alarm bells start to ring. A forty-five year old man who still lives at home with his mother must be either a paedophile, or Norman Bates, or both. But then I pull myself together. She's probably just old and frail and he's taking care of her in return for all the years she spent taking care of *him*. Yes, I say. I'll give this guy a try.

[Pause.]

"Where are you taking us to eat?" I ask him as we're driving into town on our first date.

"It's a surprise," he says. "Just wait and see!"

However, when we get there, let's just say I'm a little disappointed.

Jeremy orders a Happy Meal and large fries, but I say, "I'll just have a coffee."

[Pause.]

"Can't we go and eat somewhere just a little bit more... classy this time?" I suggest a few weeks later.

He asks me where I want to go and I tell him about this lovely little Italian restaurant I frequent quite, um... frequently. So we go there and the food is beautiful, the conversation is great. Says he's told his mother all about me and I do the whole "All good things I hope?" bit, and he says, "Naturally!"

Then the bill comes. It's expensive of course, but well worth it. And the bill sits there on the table. And he doesn't reach for it. So I wait. Still nothing.

"Shall I get this one?" I ask, smiling nervously.

And do you know what he says? He says, "Yeah, okay, thanks."

[Pause.]

And you know me, I've never been scared to say what I think. So sometime later when he and I are talking about going there for the second time, I tell him straight out, "I think it would be... um... good for our relationship... if *you* were to treat us this time."

Mega-awkward pause.

"I treated us on our first date!"

"Oh yeah, to fast *[Does fingers as quotes]* "food", that's right, I forgot."

“But sure thing,” he says. “I’m very easy-going.”

So we’re sitting chatting in the restaurant... [*Wrinkles her nose*] and he goes [*clicks fingers twice*] for the waiter. I duck my head.

When the waiter comes over to our table and asks me what I would like, I order the same dish I always have when I go there. Then the waiter turns to Jeremy.

“I’ll just have a coffee.”

“Certainly sir, and to eat?”

“No no, nothing, I’ll just have a coffee.”

The waiter raises an eyebrow, sighs, and writes down the order.

“What?!” Several heads turn. “That’s ridiculous!”

“Why? That’s all *you* ordered when I treated you last time!”

So. It turns out Mister Jeremy Clarke’s more like “*Miser* Jeremy Clarke.” He should’ve written on his profile page, “Money is of no consequence to me whatsoever. The best things in life are free. Which is why I get my old mum to buy everything *for* me.”

[*Pause.*]

Then autumn comes, and the leaves crunch under my feet as I go for my daily jog around the park. You can imagine how I jump out of my skin when I suddenly find this hunk running beside me. I’d seen him regularly and we’d waved and smiled at one another but never spoken.

“I need to keep fit,” he shouts with a grin.

“You seem fit enough to me!”

He says, “I’ve had so much pleasure watching you these past few weeks.”

God what a great pickup line!

“I’m Daniel by the way. What’s your name?”

I always dread when people ask me that question, but this time I needn’t have worried.

“Lavinia Moon, wow, how marvellous! Such a fictional-sounding name for such a... real woman!”

I smile.

Turns out Daniel is a freelance composer. How deliciously different!

“The tunes just *come* to me,” he says. “They pop into my head and I write them down. I can take no credit.”

“Well I’m a fashion editor,” I tell him.

“Wow, that explains why you look so... fashionable!”

I like this guy!

“How do you fancy coming over to my place one evening and I’ll rustle us up a nice meal from my new vegan cookbook?”

What? A man who knows how to use a stove? Error, cannot compute.

“Sure, I’d like that,” I find myself saying.

My “meal dates” haven’t gone too well so far, but anyone who can make dishes without meat, which could still be considered meals, must be a real... maestro!

[*Pause.*]

But he succeeds. And after the meal we're sitting on the couch in his impeccably neat flat and talking and the mood is all warm and intimate, and everything feels right. And next thing you know I'm leaning over and kissing him and unbuttoning his shirt. But he pulls away gently and smiles.

"It's been such a lovely evening, it really has. Let's not rush things. We don't even know each other that well yet. Let's take our time." Where did this guy come from? But when Daniel and I do make love for the first time, it's perfect. And I wake up to find hot buttered toast and coffee on the bedside table.

[Pause.]

But when he and I are having lunch, he's got an uptight face on. I ask him what the matter is, and he utters those four dreaded words.

"We need to talk."

"You... didn't enjoy last night?"

"Last night was amazing," he beams. "And I love being with you. But it helped me confirm something about myself which I've known subconsciously for a long time. Lavinia, I'm gay."

[Pause.]

Well perhaps that's why I've had such rotten luck with men, I tell myself. Maybe I just turn 'em all off, like lights. But then it dawns on me. Maybe I went wrong from the very start by *not* being gay! Maybe that's where *all* heterosexuals go wrong! I mean, bloody hell, if Daniel can just turn gay like that so can I! It can't be that hard! Perhaps I just need to "acknowledge who I am!" But then George Clooney floats into my mind and I say to myself, "Right George, I've acknowledged who I am, now come to mamma!"

[Pause.]

The thing with George though is that you don't have to live with him. But then I think, Hang on a sec. Where's it written that I have to live with *anyone*? I like my own company! I always understand myself perfectly! I did want kids. But kids are probably the same as kittens or puppies, cute until they grow up. At which point kids can't wait for you to snuff it. The one crucial difference is that pets can't answer back.

So I decide that's what I'll do. I'll get myself a dog. And she and I can do what we like when we like, eat onion sandwiches and drink diet coke, and not have to answer to anyone. Well, almost anyone. But then I realise something. I could never be a proper "free-spirited woman" with that heap of old junk in my driveway! It's time to make a real statement! And this, ladies and gentlemen, explains why you may well have seen me whizzing around in a bright new pink convertible bearing the number plate "2SEXC4U", with my Dalmatian Pankhurst sitting proudly beside me!

[Pause.]

Anyway, this year we have a white Christmas, which makes it extra special! The only thing I'm slightly Scrooge-like about when it comes to Christmas is the office party, where people I'm forced to put up with every single day suddenly want to "bond"! One of those, "Have dinner with the firm and pay for yourself" jobs.

And surprise surprise, I find I'm sitting next to someone I don't recognise. Well well well, I say to myself. Lose the antlers and he could be a bit of alright! Turns out his name is Kevin, he's just joined the firm, and he's thirty-three. Hmmmmm... Oh well, what's six years between friends?!

"Don't you hate things like this," he whispers, and I try not to choke on my sausage roll.

"It would be a pity for us both to spend Christmas alone, don't you think?" Kevin asks. "May I have your number?"

May I? Wow! Can I is rare enough, but may I? Now *those* are the words of a gentleman!

"Sorry Pankhurst," I whisper guiltily, as we exchange numbers.

"This evening didn't turn out to be so bad after all huh?" I ask Kevin as we head out together into the night.

"On the contrary," he says. "I thought it was really special." And he puts his arm around me.

And we're strolling along in comfortable silence when, "Oh my God, look at that! What kind of an egomaniac would have "Too sexy for you" as a number plate? And on a shocking-pink car too! Boy, what a pathetic loser they must be!"

I nod.

CURTAIN.

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FAR AND AWAY

*A play
by
Guy Mulinder*

[NB: Only two actors are needed for this play – one playing BARRY, and a younger man playing the other roles with slight changes of appearance.]

SCENE 1

[The lounge of a retirement home. One of the residents, BARRY, is sitting watching the horse-racing channel. There are also several life-size dummies in various relaxed poses, embodying the other elderly residents. SEYMOUR, the young nurse, walks in.]

SEYMOUR: How much have you lost so far Barry?

BARRY: Lost count.

SEYMOUR: Lucky it isn't real money then isn't it?

BARRY: Well I was sort of finking I might *put* some real money on for the big one today.

SEYMOUR: What?! I can't believe what I'm hearing! You sure you're feeling alright?!

BARRY: Well this is one of the biggest races of the year Seymour!

SEYMOUR: So which ones would you bet on then?

BARRY: Well... I'd take a boxed trifecta on ... "Far and Away"... and... "Claire de Lune"... and... number eight, whatever it's called.

SEYMOUR: You're joking, right?

BARRY: Why?

SEYMOUR: Well, number eight *miiiiiiiiight* have a chance, I'll give you that... if the first, second, and third favourites all bump into each other and break their legs. But "Far and Away" and "Claire De Lune" are rank outsiders!

BARRY: So? If you bet on the top knockers you don't win as much do you?

SEYMOUR: I've bet on the firm favourites.

BARRY: Well, clever Dick, that wouldn't get anyone to Hawaii!

SEYMOUR: Oh God Barry, you're not *still* banging on about that damn cruise are you?

BARRY: A bloke can dream. I've been wanting to cruise round Hawaii and Tahiti all my life! Cruisin' for a bruisin', whatever that means!

SEYMOUR: That sounds about right. But I mean... c'mon, what's your game? Why take "Far and Away" for Christ's sake?!

BARRY: Why d'you fink you berk? Because that's where I wanna go. Far and away!

SEYMOUR: And why "Claire De Lune"? Are you a Debussy fan?

BARRY: A what? The wife's name was Claire.

SEYMOUR: I see. And why eight? You don't even know its name, for God's sake!

BARRY: So?! It's my lucky number.

SEYMOUR: Is that all?

BARRY: You got a problem wiv that?

SEYMOUR: You got no chance mate!

[Pause.]

BARRY: *[Overly nice]* Seymour?

SEYMOUR: *[Suspiciously]* Yeeeee?

BARRY: How would you feel about popping down to the T.A.B. and putting six bucks on my trifecta for me?

SEYMOUR: You can place your bet by phone now you know.

BARRY: Ooooh God no, can't stand them fings. Never talk to a real person on them these days. Won't you just nip down?

SEYMOUR: I've already been down once this morning to put my *own* money on.

BARRY: Well bully for you! *[Pause.]* Anyway that's good, you won't mind going *again* then *will* ya? C'mon Seymour, you're the nurse in this bloody place, you're s'posed to look after me.

SEYMOUR: Oh I look after you quite enough already old chap, don't you think?

[Pause.]

BARRY: Tell you what. I'll give you a twenty per cent cut of my winnings, how's that, can't say fairer than that can I, eh?

SEYMOUR: But twenty per cent of nothing will still be nothing though won't it Barry!

BARRY: Sarky git!

[Pause.]

SEYMOUR: Oh alright, go on then, hand it over.

BARRY: Hey, that's more like it!

[BARRY takes out some gold coins.]

SEYMOUR: I'm just too nice, that's my fatal flaw. I hope you'll remember this.

BARRY: Yeah yeah yeah.

[BARRY hands SEYMOUR the money.]

BARRY: Ta! Now just make sure the only place it goes is on the 'orses won't you?

SEYMOUR: You've got more cheek than a chipmunk you have.

BARRY: 'Cause if I find when them 'orses come in that you'd gone and spent it all beforehand, I won't be a happy chappy.

SEYMOUR: I wouldn't worry too much about that.

[SEYMOUR exits, sighing and shaking his head. Snap blackout.]

SCENE 2

[Same setting, the following day. The TV still plays the racing channel in the background, but BARRY is paging through a whole stack of brochures excitedly. SEYMOUR enters carrying a newspaper.]

BARRY: Luxury cruise to Hawaii and Tahiti, 'ere we come! Oooooooooh I'm so excited! Only fink that worries me is I'm shit scared of flying!

SEYMOUR: You've never been on a plane before?

BARRY: Nope. An armchair traveller, me. Just fink, soon I'll be sipping one of them fancy cocktails with an umbrella in it and battling off the bikini babes!

SEYMOUR: You wouldn't know what to do with one if you *caught* her would you?

BARRY: I've got a pretty shrewd idea!

SEYMOUR: And anyway, just 'cause you're in the paper doesn't mean you can start getting all cocky.

[SEYMOUR hands BARRY the newspaper with a flourish.]

BARRY: Well it's only the *Christchurch Star* but it's a start I s'pose.

SEYMOUR: Still, it's not every day some old codger wins six grand on a million-to-one chance is it, let's face it. Your bet came back a thousand fold! I mean okay, number eight came in second, I can *juuuuust* about stomach that-

BARRY: Yeah, you see, told you eight was lucky-!

SEYMOUR: But how your other two got there, I'm damned if I know. It's a conspiracy!

BARRY: No no, the winner proved he was [*does fingers as quotes*] "Far and Away" the best 'orse in the race! And where did your "firm favourites" come, eh, eh? Fourth, fifth and sixth! A photo finish!

SEYMOUR: [*Smugly*] Yeah but just think... I still made 1200 lovely smackaroos out of it!

[*Pause.*]

BARRY: 'Ow d'you mean?

SEYMOUR: The twenty-percent! Pay up!

[*Pause.*]

BARRY: [*Deflates*] Aw, c'mon!

SEYMOUR: Yeah, c'mon! That was the deal!

BARRY: Ah, but hang on! You never actually *agreed* to it, you laughed at me!

SEYMOUR: My going down to the T.A.B. and putting your lousy bet on was the agreement!

BARRY: No no.

SEYMOUR: [*Smiles*] Yes yes.

BARRY: I'm not giving you 1200 bucks just for going down to the bloody T.A.B. and placing a bet. If you were a *female* nurse I might consider it.

SEYMOUR: May I remind you that without me you couldn't've put the bet *on*!

[*Pause.*]

BARRY: [*Deflates*] But... I *need* this money.

SEYMOUR: So do I mate! I've got a family to support and I spend all bloody day in this crummy job as it is. Twenty per cent. You said it not me.

BARRY: But I fought I'd only win... I dunno... hundred and fifty, two hundred at the most, prob'ly nuffing!

SEYMOUR: But you didn't.

[Pause.]

BARRY: This is riddickluss! Daylight robbery is what it is.

SEYMOUR: Is that so? *[Exiting]* Well you know what Barry? That's just fine! If you can't keep your side of the deal, then fine, enjoy Hawaii-

BARRY: *[Sighing]* Wait, wait, wait.

[SEYMOUR slinks back in.]

SEYMOUR: You rang, m'lord?

BARRY: You can have your lousy twenty per cent if you're that bloody desperate.

SEYMOUR: Really? How magnanimous of you! And I trust you'll be organising a nice party here at the home as well?

[Pause.]

BARRY: Eh? What the hell for?

SEYMOUR: Well you're the Donald Trump of Happy Valley now aren't you?

BARRY: The what?

SEYMOUR: Most of the poor sods in here won't ever be going *anywhere*, let alone on a luxury cruise!

[Pause.]

BARRY: Well... I'll... I could order a few cakes I guess, if I 'ave to.

SEYMOUR: Yeah, and...?

BARRY: Aaawww bloody 'ell.

SEYMOUR: A nice bottle of shampers for everybody, a lovely spread, a day to remember. C'mon Barry, don't be such a cheapskate!

[Pause.]

BARRY: Why don't you go and clean up some puke!

[Snap blackout.]

SCENE 3

[The same setting a few days later. A large party has just taken place at the home, and the remnants of it remain. There is a big, colourful sign reading, "Congratulations Barry!" As usual, BARRY is sitting watching the racing channel, only this time he is slumped glumly in his seat, wearing a party hat. SEYMOUR enters.]

SEYMOUR: That was a really nice do Barry!

BARRY: *[Clenched teeth]* Yeah. Very... swish.

SEYMOUR: Didn't it feel nice to do that?

BARRY: Hmph!

SEYMOUR: Especially after so many of them almost choked on their false teeth in the earthquake! Speaking of which, you'll be able to give generously now won't you?

BARRY: To what?

SEYMOUR: The Canterbury Earthquake Appeal of course.

[Pause.]

[BARRY gives SEYMOUR a look. Pause.]

BARRY: *[Sighs]* Well...

SEYMOUR: What d'you mean, "Well..."?! You were *part* of it, you *felt* it!

BARRY: Yeah I know and I got a bloody big fright! All the mirrors in the place broke, that's seven years' bad luck before we start, and I ain't even got seven years *left*! Far as I'm concerned, the Earfquake Appeal should be giving money to *me*!

SEYMOUR: You mean to tell me that your own city gets battered and bruised by a 7.1 quake and you're not going to donate anything?!

BARRY: Um...

SEYMOUR: C'mon you can spare a thousand or so.

BARRY: A fousand?! You're pulling my tit! I told you, I *need* this money!

SEYMOUR: People who've lost everything need it more, don't you think? Plus it's coming up to Christmas.

BARRY: Oh, sod Christmas. There're more rapes... and burgle-ries... and drunken husbands beating up their missus... at Christmas than at any uvva time of the year!

SEYMOUR: *[Sighing]* You say that *every* year.

BARRY: Well it's true innit?

SEYMOUR: *[Shrugs]* All the more reason why your thousand dollars would do some good.

[Pause.]

BARRY: What about this luxury cruise o' mine?!

SEYMOUR: Oh there's plenty left for that.

BARRY: Well, I'm prepared to drop Tahiti at a push if I 'ave to, but you can whistle for any more!

SEYMOUR: No-one's asking you to drop *anything*. *[Pause.]* So! How much can you spare?

[Snap blackout.]

SCENE 4

[Same setting, a few days later. BARRY is sitting watching the racing channel when his son PAUL enters.]

PAUL: Dad!

BARRY: 'Ello Paul old son! Well well well, ain't this a nice surprise! I almost didn't reccanise you!

PAUL: Yeah, sorry, it *has* been a while hasn't it? I keep saying to Jacqui there just aren't enough hours in the day, I just don't know where the time goes!

BARRY: Hmmmm... wish I 'ad that problem. The aftershocks are the only fings what keep me awake now!

PAUL: Ah, yes, the novelty's wearing off a bit isn't it? You coping alright with them?

BARRY: I'll live.

PAUL: That's a relief. You still fighting fit?

BARRY: If I was any fitter I'd be dangerous. *[Pause.]* I never fought I'd be saying this but it's prob'ly a good fing you was so... inconsistent 'bout me going into care.

PAUL: I was *not* insistent.

BARRY: Because just fink, if I was still living on Avonside Drive, I'd be in the bloody river by now.

PAUL: Yeah...

BARRY: What wiv all that... liquification.

PAUL: Liquefaction.

BARRY: Eh?

PAUL: Yeah, you're right.

[PAUL sighs. Heavy pause. PAUL tries to lighten the mood again.]

PAUL: Aaaaaanyway! When we saw the article in *The Star* I thought I'd dash around and say congrats!

BARRY: Ta. I've become a geriatric celebrity overnight. Bit like, um... Sue whatsherface...

PAUL: Susan Boyle.

BARRY: Eh?

PAUL: Susan Boyle.

BARRY: That's right, Susan Boyle, that's 'er!

[Pause.]

PAUL: I didn't know you were a big gambler dad. I mean, I knew you liked the horses but... wow!

BARRY: Aaaaaw I ain't a "big gambler" Paul, you know that! If I *was* I wouldn't've bet on them partic'lar 'orses would I? Usually it's just play-play and I lose a fortune, but this time I fought I'd take a risk and, hey, it paid off! Now I can finally go on that cruise to Hawaii and Tahiti in style! Well... Hawaii anyway.

PAUL: Ha! You still have a bit of a thing for that then?!

BARRY: Yeah, I'm busy making all the bookings right now! While my eyesight's still just good enough to eye up the bikini babes. And my legs are still just good enough to sort of... crawl along after 'em.

PAUL: Whoa, stop dad, you're making me jealous! Wow, Jacqui and Emily will be so excited when they hear about this! *[Pause.]* They send their love too of course. They've been meaning to swing by, but what with all the hassle of Emily preparing for varsity next year everything's just been so hectic!

BARRY: She still planning to do, um... phys... physi... psycho....?

PAUL: Social work. You know, er... helping people.

BARRY: Oh, well then. I 'ope I stay alive long enough for 'er to 'elp *me*!

PAUL: It's what she's always wanted to do, she says. But those tuition fees, *[whistles]*, boy oh boy, I've been worked off my feet.

[Pause.]

BARRY: Well, um... would you like some 'elp? I can 'elp people too you know.

PAUL: What? *[Pause.]* Oh God dad, no no no no no, that wasn't a hint! I was just *saying*!

BARRY: Well I mean, I could... put somefink *towards* it if you fink it would-

PAUL: Ah dad, you're a pal but we wouldn't *dream* of taking your money, you... you treat *yourself* for a change! Me and my big mouth!

BARRY: No, I... I'd like to!

PAUL: You would? Really? You sure?

BARRY: 'Course! She *is* my only granddaughter for God's sake!

PAUL: Oh dad, what can I say, she'll be so chuffed, thanks mate!

[PAUL shakes BARRY warmly by the hand. Snap blackout.]

SCENE 5

[Same setting a few days later. BARRY is sitting watching the racing channel when SEYMOUR enters.]

SEYMOUR: You all packed then?

BARRY: Yeah! So just fink of me while you're emptying bedpans won't you!

SEYMOUR: Hey, just you watch it! Because when you come back, I'll still be here. And you're going to get older... and older... and older. And when you yell out, "Seeeeymooouuuur" I'll just go, "Nope, sorry, Seymour's not here."

BARRY: Ah, but I might *not* come back, you ever fought o' that? Eh? If the... area agrees with me, you won't see me for dust!

SEYMOUR: Speaking of not seeing for dust, you have remembered to take a pair of binoculars with you haven't you? Because you'll need them!

BARRY: You bet! I wanna really get up close! See the water bouncing off their bodies!

SEYMOUR: *[Laughing]* Well, you'll be there in no time! I can't believe you've never been there, you'll love it!

BARRY: Damned right I will! I've always *wanted* a whale-watching weekend! Kaikoura, 'ere I come!

CURTAIN.

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BLACK WIDOW

*A play
by
Guy Mulinder*

SCENE 1

[CAROLINE's lounge. The room stands empty for a few seconds. Then the doorbell rings and CAROLINE answers it off-stage.]

CAROLINE: *[Off-stage]* Jack, Lucy, how lovely to see you-!

JACK: *[Off-stage]* Hi there Caroline, likewise-

LUCY: *[Off-stage]* Thanks so much for inviting us-!

CAROLINE: *[Off-stage]* Oh Jack, you look as handsome as ever. And Lucy, don't you look... smart. Won't you come on through, I'll just go and rescue our meal before it *[flamboyantly]* burns to a crisp!

[JACK and LUCY enter the lounge. JACK, a sexy man in his mid-30s, is still wearing his suit and tie from work while his equally attractive younger wife LUCY is, as always, too ostentatiously dressed for the occasion. The pair speaks in a whispered hiss. JACK sighs.]

LUCY: Smile, it might never happen.

JACK: I'm fucking exhausted.

LUCY: Good.

[Pause.]

JACK: Sorry?

LUCY: It's good when you're being kept busy.

JACK: *[Scoffs]* Oh that's rich! Your job isn't exactly strenuous!

LUCY: Excuse me! I spend my entire week trying to make haggard old tarts look like Keira Knightley while you sit in your little ivory tower all day long.

JACK: Now that's enough of that my girl!

[Pause.]

LUCY: *[Coldly]* Don't call me that, you know I can't stand it.

JACK: What?

LUCY: I don't want to be your "girl."

JACK: *[Shrugs; dryly]* Suits me. *[Pause.]* I must tell Caroline that, just remind me will you?

LUCY: What's she got to do with it?

JACK: Something tells me she'd be rather glad to hear it, that's all I'm saying.

LUCY: What?! You mean she...?! *[Snorts]* Nah, even *she'd* know better!

JACK: Oh yeah? Just you watch! When she sails back in what's the bet she'll do her usual, "Jack, you come and sit here by me"?

LUCY: She never does that!

JACK: Only all the time.

LUCY: Well *I've* never noticed.

JACK: *[Muttered]* No, probably not.

LUCY: What's that supposed to mean?

JACK: *[Sighing]* Nothing.

[Pause.]

LUCY: And even if she does, she's probably just lonely.

JACK: Oh, well thanks very much! So she can't just fancy me because she has good taste, is that it?

[Pause. LUCY puts her fingers inside JACK's shirt.]

LUCY: I suppose so.

[Pause.]

JACK: And anyway there's no excuse for Caroline to stay lonely the rest of her life, she's a very sophisticated woman.

LUCY: Do you really think so?

JACK: Of course!

LUCY: Does that mean you find her attractive?

JACK: Um... *[shrugs]* yes. I do.

[LUCY gives JACK a slightly odd look. CAROLINE can be heard coming down the hall, so LUCY and JACK snap-to in a rather contrived fashion. CAROLINE enters. She is a striking but slightly fading woman of forty.]

CAROLINE: I'm so sorry about that-!

JACK: No problem-

LUCY: Can I help with anything-?

CAROLINE: Nope, everything's hunky dory. *[Pause.]* God, what a formal lot you are, sit, sit! Jack, you come and sit here by me.

[JACK and LUCY look at each other. JACK does so.]

CAROLINE: Lucy, you too dear!

[LUCY sits. CAROLINE remembers something.]

CAROLINE: Oh! Before we get settled, what can I get you to drink? Will you both have your usual or can I... whip you up one of my exotic cocktails?

LUCY: Er, what'll *you* have?

CAROLINE: Too much.

[CAROLINE bellows a loud laugh. The others chuckle very stiffly.]

JACK: I think I might just try one of your-!

LUCY: *[Domineering]* Er, our usual will be fine, thank you.

CAROLINE: Usual for you Luce? Jack, you were saying?

JACK: *[Sighing]* No I'll have my usual too thanks.

CAROLINE: Wow. Adventurous aren't we? Okay, comin' right up.

LUCY: *[Rising]* I'll help-

CAROLINE: *[Playfully]* No no, you just mind your own precious business, *I'm* the hostess this evening!

[LUCY, flustered by CAROLINE's candour, flops back into her chair. CAROLINE fixes the three of them drinks during the next conversation.]

CAROLINE: God knows I don't often get the chance to play the hostess much any more. Or even the guest for that matter. You tend to feel like the odd one out when you're a widow you know. *[A warning finger]* Not that I want any sympathy, mind.

JACK: You don't have to feel that way, you should go back onto the dating scene again-

LUCY: Yes, you *owe* it to yourself!

CAROLINE: *[Scoffs]* Ah, baloney.

LUCY & JACK: Why not?

CAROLINE: They were such wonderful trips the four of us used to go on when Michael was still alive weren't they? You two were such good friends, eh Jack? But now you know what they say, three's a crowd.

JACK: Oh you mustn't think that-

LUCY: No, that's nonsense!

CAROLINE: Is it? Then how come we haven't gone on holiday together in, what, five years?

LUCY: Well Jack and I have the kids now Caroline, don't forget.

CAROLINE: I'm aware of that Lucy, I'm not *blaming* you.

[Awkward pause. CAROLINE resumes her seat next to JACK.]

CAROLINE: How *are* the little... *[wrinkles nose]* poppets by the way?

LUCY: They're as sweet as can be! They'll be missing their father again soon though.

JACK: Mm. Out of town on business for a fortnight or so.

CAROLINE: *[A sly smile]* Again?

JACK: 'Fraid so.

CAROLINE: Oh well you're a very busy man aren't you. *[Rests her hand on JACK's knee.]* Veeeery busy.

[JACK shifts awkwardly and glances at LUCY.]

CAROLINE: Well honey, you simply must let me have you for dinner again while your hubby's away. *[A loud laugh.]* Have you *over* for dinner, I should say. A "Girls' Night In", how about that?

LUCY: Sure, I'm up for that!

CAROLINE: Great! I'll call you in a couple of days and we can make arrangements!

JACK: Ooooooh, I'm always fairly suspicious of these "Girls' Nights In" myself!

CAROLINE: *[Patting JACK's knee]* Oh, you would be wouldn't you? *[Pause.]* Well... shall we eat?

LUCY: Sounds great!

JACK: What's that delicious smell?

CAROLINE: Me!

[A brief, embarrassed laugh from JACK and LUCY. They follow CAROLINE to the dining-room, looking at each other awkwardly when her back is turned.]

SCENE 2

[CAROLINE's lounge, a few days later. CAROLINE enters and glances at the clock on the wall which shows 6:30pm on the dot. The doorbell rings. She gives a wry chuckle at the punctuality of it. However, instead of going out of the room to answer the door, CAROLINE chooses this precise moment to lie sprawled languorously across the couch. She pours herself a drink, picks up a magazine and pages through it lazily. The doorbell rings again. CAROLINE yawns, stretches, lies back and continues to read. There is a knock. CAROLINE'S cellphone rings. She fishes it out, checks the caller identity on the screen, stifles laughter and psyches herself up. She answers the phone.]

CAROLINE: Hello, Caroline speaking?... Oh, Lucy, hi!... Oh I'm so relieved it's you, I've been so worried... Well you never pitched up last night, I've been trying to get hold of you all day... Hm?... What?... Yeah, dinner last night, remember, we pencilled it in?... What was that?... You thought it was *tonight*?... Oh dear, you must've misheard... No I *never* said tonight, I'm at the book club right this minute... Hm?... Don't keep apologising, the fact that I stood stoving over a hot slave was nothing... Why, where are *you* now?... You're what?... Outside my house?... Oh God... All that way for nothing?... And a babysitter for the kids and everything!... Mm... Well the only other night I'm free is tomorrow but you don't want to make that long trip there and back two days in a row do you, so... You sure?... Okay, well, shall we make it tomorrow then?... Same time?... Now that's *tomorrow* remember, not the day after, not yesterday, but toooooo-mmmmmorrow! Wonderful... Looking forward to it... You too... 'Night!

[CAROLINE hangs up, silences a fit of hysterics and resumes her position on the couch. Shortly afterwards, we hear the sound of a car driving away.]

SCENE 3

[CAROLINE's dining-room, the following evening. CAROLINE and LUCY are eating dinner. Once again, LUCY is dressed far too ostentatiously for the occasion.]

CAROLINE: How much longer is he away for?

LUCY: Till the end of next week.

CAROLINE: He's got a lot on his mind right now.

LUCY: Mmmmm. What makes *you* say that?

CAROLINE: Oh, I know, trust me. You see, the truth is, I didn't just invite you over here for dinner. There's something else. Something... terribly serious.

[There is a short, uncomfortable silence. LUCY looks uneasy but waits for CAROLINE to speak.]

CAROLINE: It's about Jack.

LUCY: Is he alright?! What d'you know, what's happened?

CAROLINE: No no, nothing's... *[chuckles ironically] happened.*

[Another silence.]

LUCY: What is it? Please, you *must* tell me!

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: You're right. That's what I thought too. It's best you should know. He promised me he would tell you himself before he left but of course he didn't! I should've known!

LUCY: Oh Caroline, for God's sake, what is it?!

[Very long pause. CAROLINE makes a show of pulling herself together. Both women speak quietly and falteringly from now on.]

CAROLINE: To be honest Lucy, I don't even know how to break it to you.

LUCY: Oh God...

CAROLINE: And you know me, I'm not usually short of words. *[Sighs deeply]* I think there's nothing for it but for me to tell you straight out. *[Pregnant pause.]* Lucy, Jack and I have been having an affair.

[Long pause.]

LUCY: No.

CAROLINE: For six months now. Over the summer.

LUCY: *[Quiet hysteria]* No no no no no.

CAROLINE: Well, there it is. I've said it.

[CAROLINE Sighs deeply. Long pause.]

SCENE 4

[CAROLINE's lounge, the following day. There is furious, repetitive ringing of the doorbell and pounding on the door.]

JACK: *[Off-stage]* Open this door! Open the fucking door now!

CAROLINE: *[Off-stage, casually]* Alright alright, I'm coming, Jesus!

[Off-stage, CAROLINE opens the door. JACK barges past her into the lounge, LUCY following him.]

CAROLINE: *[Instantly]* I had to tell her Jack, she had a right to know and I knew you'd never've had the guts!

JACK: What the fuck is this about?

CAROLINE: I know you younger men think you can have your cake and eat it too, but I refuse to be strung along forever Jack!

LUCY: Would somebody tell me what's going on here?!

JACK: I had my wife phone me up last night, beside herself. I had to catch the first fucking flight back, we sat up and fought about complete bullshit all night and the kids were in tears, now what the fuck are you playing at?

CAROLINE: Why don't you be honest for once in your life Jack and tell your dear wife what you promised me? That you're leaving her! Or have you changed your mind about that too?

[LUCY cries out.]

JACK: *[To LUCY]* Don't listen to the woman, she's lying!

CAROLINE: Oh so it's "the woman" now is it? And why the hell would I lie about something like this?

JACK: Because you're fucking sick in the head, that's why!

CAROLINE: Oh yeah, it's so easy to hurl insults now isn't it! But we both know that only oily snakes who have something to hide lie!

LUCY: How could the two of you do this? To our *kids*? *[To JACK]* All the times you've been away on business Jack and it crossed my mind that you might – just might – be... you know... I never dreamed that you'd be shitting on your own doorstep, with... *[gestures at CAROLINE.]*

JACK: Lucy do you really think, when I have a beautiful wife and a wonderful family, that I would jeopardise it all with an old hag like that over there? I wouldn't touch her with a bargepole!

CAROLINE: It's not *that* kind of pole she's *worried* about pal.

LUCY: You told me you thought she was attractive!

JACK: [*Flounders slightly*] Yes but that's before I found out she was a poisonous old-

CAROLINE: Yes, that's it, go on, sink even lower-

JACK: Shut your mouth you caustic cunt-!

CAROLINE: I should've known you weren't worth it. That you... objectify women! It's your wife I feel sorry for, you know. Even more than myself. In a way I think it's good that all this happened, because now we'll *both* be well rid of you and you'll have no-one.

JACK: [*About to strike CAROLINE*] I've had just about enough of this.

LUCY: Jack, don't!!

[*JACK stops, hand in mid-air.*]

CAROLINE: See what I mean Lucy? He's fine as long as everything's the way *he* wants it.

[*JACK sighs hopelessly and lowers his hand. He flounders.*]

JACK: Lucy please, let's go home and talk about this!

CAROLINE: Go on, crawl back to her.

LUCY: We talked all *night* Jack.

CAROLINE: That's right girl, you tell him!

JACK: [*To CAROLINE*] Shut up!! [*To LUCY, softly*] Please?

[*Long pause. LUCY relents and hopelessly gestures to JACK to follow her out.*]

JACK: You haven't heard the last of this.

CAROLINE: I hope *not*.

JACK: You're fucking mad.

CAROLINE: Oh, on the contrary. I'm so incredibly sane it scares you shitless.

JACK: You should be locked up-

CAROLINE: [*Dismissively*] Oh fuck off why don't you.

[CAROLINE turns her back on JACK. In his anger, JACK takes a sweep at a few of CAROLINE's china plates, vases etc, and they shatter.]

CAROLINE: Well... that'll *add* to your costs won't it?

[LUCY walks shakily out the door, followed by JACK. A pause as CAROLINE stands surveying the carnage and reflecting on these events, satisfied.]

SCENE 5

[CAROLINE's lounge,, a few days later. CAROLINE and LUCY sit in uncomfortable silence for a moment.]

CAROLINE: To say I didn't think I'd see you again so soon would be the understatement of the century.

LUCY: Yeah, well... we need to talk.

CAROLINE: Haven't we all done enough of that?

LUCY: *[Sighs]* Not quite. I hope Jack doesn't try to come back.

CAROLINE: Come back where, here?

LUCY: No, home. *[Laughs bitterly at the word.]* "Home." I threw him out.

CAROLINE: *[Sighs]* I see. *[Pause.]* Now here's the thing. What he *should* have done if he'd had any brains – and what *you* should do now if *you* had any – would be to use this whole thing as the perfect excuse to get out of a ridiculous marriage, farm the brats off to some poor fucker, and come and live with *me* instead! Because *you're* piping hot too you know, even though you try far too hard and you still have oh so very much to learn about life! Or, better still, we could get a nice little ménage à trois thing going! Have weekly threesomes!

[Pause.]

LUCY: Are you done?

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: Is that a yes then?

[LUCY gives CAROLINE a look.]

LUCY: I detest you. I never wanted to see your face again.

CAROLINE: Then why are you here?

LUCY: Because I need your help.

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: You need *my* help?

LUCY: Yes. Sad isn't it?

CAROLINE: Look Lucy, I really don't know what more I can say to you about this whole thing.

LUCY: The less, the better.

CAROLINE: Well why do you need me then if you "detest" me?

LUCY: [Simply] Because I detest Jack more. Come to think of it he always was a cocky son-of-a-bitch. And I want to make him pay.

CAROLINE: You're gunna sue him for every cent he's got, right?

LUCY: Oh no, money's nothing to Jack. I want to *shame* him. I'm going to stir up such a huge fucking scandal, and make such a ginormous red mark on his lily-white arse, that he'll wish he'd never been born.

CAROLINE: And you want me to be *part* of this scandal I suppose?!

LUCY: Only in terms of helping me... bring it about.

CAROLINE: You mean... you want to set him up?

LUCY: Not just set him up. Hang him out to dry!

CAROLINE: But why do you need *my* help for that?

LUCY: Because the... master plan I've concocted, I can't carry out on my own.

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: [Sighs] Nope. I'm sorry Lucy. Good luck with it, but I'm not gunna get involved in another stinking mess.

LUCY: It's never bothered you before. And anyway, you'd be strictly "behind-the-scenes", I promise. He took advantage of *you too* Caroline. He let you get your hopes up. Don't you want to help me send him crashing down?

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: [Sighs] What's the plan?

LUCY: We get Jack over here on the pretext of wanting to talk this whole thing through calmly and rationally... [looks pointedly at CAROLINE] like adults-

CAROLINE: Oh yeah, sure, like he'll swallow that!

LUCY: He will if we do it convincingly. And now here's the good bit! We give his drink a bit of a spike!

CAROLINE: Oh c'mon...

LUCY: Why not?

CAROLINE: With what?

LUCY: I got myself some valium. [*Looks pointedly at CAROLINE*] I've been rather traumatised lately.

[*Pause.*]

CAROLINE: And what would happen then?

LUCY: Yes yes, I'm getting to that. And when he's out cold, we strip him down to his how's-your-father, take photos of him with some tart and-

CAROLINE: "Some tart"? Was that a dig at me?

LUCY: No no no, not you, just listen! A hooker! And we-

CAROLINE: This is the stupidest idea I've ever heard-

LUCY: No, it's totally brilliant! And we take photos of him with some prostitute from... I dunno... "Give a Fuck Escort Agency" or something like that-

CAROLINE: [*Laughing*] "GAFF" for short-

LUCY: [*Laughing*] ...And get them splashed all over the paper! Just think of it! "High-powered lawyer involved in sex scandal"! Ha! Ooooooooooooooh I love it!

CAROLINE: But hang on, I don't want some whore coming round here!

LUCY: Isn't that a bit pot kettle? And anyway, we couldn't very well do it at my house *could* we? Hm?

[*Pause.*]

CAROLINE: Well I suppose it... *could* work.

LUCY: 'Course it could, it's inspired!

CAROLINE: And it *would* be a hoot-

LUCY: Priceless!

CAROLINE: I still don't see why you'd need or want *me* there though.

LUCY: Oh, to help with the dressing and undressing and the... lugging around. Plus you're a bigger bullshitter than me.

CAROLINE: [*Elvis impersonation*] Thank you, thank you very much!

LUCY: So! You in or what?

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: [*Shrugging*] Aaaaaw hell, why not!

SCENE 6

[*CAROLINE's lounge, the following evening.*]

CAROLINE: I can't believe he's actually coming round here.

LUCY: Ah you see, I can be quite a good actress when I have to.

CAROLINE: [*Simpering impersonation*] "Jack I have to know the truth, I want to hear each side of the story calmly, in turn, without interruptions."

LUCY: Not bad huh?

CAROLINE: Let's just hope the hooker doesn't rock up till he's out cold.

LUCY: Don't worry, it's all taken care of. Oh, and get this! [*Guffawing*] Her name is... her name is... Rosie Glow!

[Pause.]

CAROLINE: [*Laughing*] You're shittin' me!

LUCY: It's true! Not even *I* could've come up with that!

CAROLINE &
LUCY: Rosie Glow!

[*They give way to fits of laughter.*]

CAROLINE: What'll we tell her when she asks why we're doing this?

LUCY: Oh come off it, what does she care? And if she does, we'll just tell her that, um... that it's his stag party and we want him to have a laugh when he wakes up.

[*The doorbell rings.*]

LUCY: Let the games begin! Camera ready?

CAROLINE: Very.

[The doorbell rings again.]

LUCY: *[Conspiratorially]* I'll pour the drinks.

[CAROLINE smiles, then exits to answer the door. LUCY prepares the drinks, with her back to the audience.]

JACK: *[Off-stage]* This is a joke-

CAROLINE: *[Off-stage]* It's for Lucy's sake.

JACK: *[Off-stage]* Like you care about her.

[CAROLINE re-enters with JACK. There is an icy pause.]

LUCY: *[Tentatively]* Hello Jack.

[JACK nods half-heartedly.]

CAROLINE: Have a seat.

[JACK sighs and sits reluctantly. CAROLINE follows suit. LUCY hands them their drinks.]

LUCY: I've made you your usual Jack, is that alright?

JACK: I couldn't give a fuck any more.

CAROLINE: *[Tauntingly, to JACK]* Oh now now, let's have a little bit of co-operation shall we.

[CAROLINE hides a smirk behind her liqueur glass. LUCY sits, visibly distressed. Pause.]

LUCY: Well, now that we're all here, who shall we hear from first?

JACK: Well, as I've told you a thousand fucking times this week, I can sum it up in two words. "Caroline's lying."

LUCY: Oh come on, that's not very constructive is it?

JACK: It's true! There's nothing else to discuss. She and I have never slept together, she's a barmy bitch, and that's the end of it.

LUCY: *[Sighs]* Caroline?

CAROLINE: Well, you know what *I've* told you, and you know what *he's* told you. *[Yawns]* So it basically comes down to who you believe. *[Rubs eyes.]* I know that what I told you is the truth but I can't *prove* it! *[Sits up straighter.]* He claims I'm lying but he can't prove that either. It's... *[Yawns.]* It's...

[CAROLINE's head slumps forward onto the table. This knocks the drinks over, and JACK and LUCY find this hugely funny. JACK jumps up eagerly and slaps CAROLINE's cheek several times to make sure she's out.]

JACK: It worked! It worked! Oh well done honey, great job! Now! Let's do the business! I'll take the top half, you take the bottom. Ready? One, two, three!

[JACK and LUCY hoist CAROLINE up, and carry her to the bedroom.]

SCENE 7

[CAROLINE's bedroom, immediately following the previous scene. JACK and LUCY throw CAROLINE down on the bed carelessly, undress her, tie her to the bed bondage-style, pour some liquor over her face, throw some dollar bills over her, and take some photographs. Chuckling, JACK picks up the phone on CAROLINE's bedside table.]

JACK: Er, police... Yeah my name's, um, Bob. Bob, er, Doolittle, it seems as though the woman who lives downstairs is having an altercation with one of her, um, clients... Yep, it's, er, 69 Poplar Place... Okay, good, thanks, bye.

[JACK hangs up.]

JACK: We did it, we did it, we did it!

LUCY: Oh God I wish I could be a fly on the wall! But quick, let's scoot before they get here.

[JACK and LUCY start exiting.]

JACK: Has *this* proved it to you, after I've done all this?

[Pause.]

LUCY: *[Wistfully]* No, not entirely.

JACK: *[Disbelieving.]* What d'you mean?

LUCY: Well you heard what she said. Neither of you can ever prove *anything*. So I guess I'll just have to, um... *[Shrugs; gloomily]* Come on, let's go home.

[LUCY exits briskly. JACK sighs heavily and goes after her, far less happy than a moment ago.]

CURTAIN.